

DR. GRAESLER

BY

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CHAPTER ONE

THE steamer was ready to cast off. Dr. Graesler and the hotel manager stood on the deck together, Dr. Graesler in a grey overcoat with a black armlet on his sleeve, the manager with his head bared, his smoothly plastered hair scarcely stirred by the breeze.

"My dear doctor," the manager was saying in the affable tone that Graesler found so irritating, "let me repeat: we count upon your returning next year, in spite of the misfortune you had here—the deeply distressing misfortune."

Dr. Graesler made no answer. His eyes were moist as he looked shoreward, where the huge hotel, with white shutters closed to keep out the heat, glared in the sunshine. His gaze wandered over the slumbering yellow houses and dusty gardens which stretched beneath the noonday sun obliquely upwards to the remnants of the crumbling wall that crowned the hill.

"Our guests," continued the manager, "all think so highly of you, and many of them are sure to come again next season. We confidently expect you to occupy the little villa again"—he pointed to a modest but cheerful house adjoining the hotel—"in spite of the painful memories it holds for you."

Graesler shook his head sadly. He removed his hard black bowler and smoothed his hair. He had fair, wiry hair, which was beginning to turn grey.

The manager persisted.

"My dear doctor, time works wonders. Besides, if you dread the loneliness of the little white house, you have the remedy in your own hands. Bring a pretty little wife back with you from Germany."

Graesler's only answer was a hesitating lift of his eyes. The manager went merrily on. His tone was almost imperious.

"Please think it over. A pretty little wife with golden hair—or black hair if you like. The lack of a wife is probably the one thing that stands between you and perfection."

Dr. Graesler raised his brows. His eyes looked as if he were staring at the retreating images of the past.

"But no matter," the manager concluded blithely, "whether you come back married or single, you will always be welcome. You will be here, won't you, as we arranged, on October 27th? Communications are still so unsatisfactory that unless you come then, you can't possibly get here before November 10th. And since we open on the first"—the manager's voice turned a trifle harsh, like a drill-sergeant's—it always made Graesler wince—"that would be rather inconvenient."

Giving the doctor's hand a hard shake, a habit he had acquired in the United States, and exchanging a farewell glance with a passing officer of the ship, the manager stepped briskly down the companion. A moment later he appeared on the gangway, from which he nodded a final salutation to the doctor, who continued to stand gloomily, hat

in hand, gazing over the bulwark. A few minutes later the steamer was under way.

On the homeward voyage, during which the weather was beautiful, the manager's parting words often recurred to Graesler. As he dozed in the afternoon in his comfortable long-chair on the upper deck, a rug over his knees, he sometimes had a dreamlike vision of a plump and pretty woman in a white summer dress gliding through the house and the garden. She had a pink doll's face, which came to him as the memory, not of anyone he had met in real life, but of some picture he must have seen in a book or an illustrated paper. His dream had the mysterious power of laying the ghost of his dead sister and so giving him the sense that she had left the world a long while before, and in a less unnatural way than the actuality. But there were other hours in which sad memories came fully awake and the terrible experience recurred with intolerable vividness.

It had taken place only a week before. As often happened, Graesler had fallen asleep in the garden after luncheon, over his medical journal. When he awoke, he saw from the lengthening shadow of the palm tree that he must have been asleep at least two hours. That annoyed him; he took it as a sign of advancing years—he was forty-eight. He rose, thrust the journal into his pocket, with an eager wish for the refreshing spring breezes of Germany, and walked slowly towards the little house where he lived with his older sister.

He saw her standing at one of the windows. That was strange: during the hot hours the shutters were usually closed. Then he noticed that Friederike, seen from closer by, was not smiling at him as he had thought; she had her back turned and was absolutely motionless. A trifle uneasy—why, he could not have told—he hastened into the house. He found his sister leaning, apparently, against the window-frame, still motionless, and he noticed with horror that her head was hanging forward, her eyes were fixed and staring, and round her neck was a cord fastened to the top of the frame.

"Friederike!" he cried.

He drew out his pocket-knife and cut the cord. The lifeless form fell into his arms. He shouted for the servant in the kitchen, who had no inkling of what had happened, and with her aid carried his sister to the couch. He did his utmost to restore her to life, and the servant ran to fetch the hotel manager. But even before he came Dr. Graesler realized that all was over, and the manager found him on his knees beside his sister's body, weak and distraught.

Dr. Graesler racked his brains in an attempt to account for his sister's suicide. It seemed almost incredible that she, a mature spinster, in comfortable circumstances, with whom he had lightly chatted at luncheon about the approaching voyage, should suddenly have gone mad. A more probable supposition was that Friederike had been troubled with suicidal impulses for a long time, perhaps for

years, and had chosen this quiet afternoon hour for the carrying out of a plan that had ripened gradually. Occasionally it had struck her brother that perhaps her outward equanimity concealed a gentle melancholy; but his time and energy were too much taken up with his work for him to pay much attention to anything of the sort. Now, on reflection, he realized that since childhood he had hardly ever seen Friederike really cheerful.

He knew little of her younger days; he had been a ship's surgeon, continually away from home. It was not until after their parents' death, in quick succession, fifteen years before, that Friederike left her old home in the little country town to keep house for her brother after he left the service of the Norddeutscher Lloyd. By then she was well on in the thirties, but still had a young and graceful figure, and her eyes gave an impression of enigmatical gloom, so that she had no lack of wooers, and Emil sometimes felt he had good reason to fear that one of them might some day deprive him of her company. The years passed, no wooer ever did carry her off, the last chances vanished, and she seemed to accept her lot without repining.

But now, on thinking matters over, her brother fancied he could recall numerous dumbly reproachful glances, as if she had held him partly responsible for the cheerlessness of her life. Perhaps the consciousness that her life had been wasted had grown constantly keener, especially as she gave no open expression to the feeling, until at last the gnawing ache of it had driven her to make a sudden end.

Her brother, who had so little suspected the approach of tragedy, had now to turn his attention to domestic details, of which Friederike had always relieved him, and that at a time in life when a man hates most to make a change.

Toward the end of his trip a feeling of estrangement toward Friederike crept into his heart, a little resentment—without prejudice to his mourner's mood—that she had gone without a good-by, had left him quite unprepared and all alone in the world. It was a chill thought, yet somehow consoling.

CHAPTER TWO

AFTER a brief stay in Berlin, where he paid his respects to a number of consulting physicians, Dr. Graesler returned on a beautiful May day to the health resort at which he had practised for the past six summers. He was warmly welcomed by his housekeeper, an elderly woman, a tradesman's widow, and was delighted to see the simple wild flowers with which she had decorated the house for his reception. It was not without uneasiness that he entered the little room his sister had occupied during the previous year—he was less profoundly moved than he had expected.

Graesler soon settled down to life as he found it. The spa was a

small place, engirdled with well-wooded hills. The skies were limpid, and the air had the genial warmth of spring. Often an unwonted sense of freedom from restraint came over him. At breakfast for instance. No one, to be sure, to save him the trouble of pouring coffee for himself, but also no hint of restriction at the dainty table set out on the little balcony and decked with its blue-flowered coffee service, which glistened in the morning sunlight.

His other meals he took in the principal hotel of the town, in the company of some of the leading residents, old acquaintances with whom conversation was easy and many times entertaining. His practice was soon all that could be desired, and there were no cases of exceptional gravity to trouble his sense of professional responsibility.

The early weeks of summer passed almost without incident when, one July evening, after a busy day, Dr. Graesler was summoned to the ranger's lodge, an hour's drive from town. The doctor was not pleased; he was not eager for practice among the permanent residents; it brought him little either in the way of reputation or fees. Still, as he drove up the valley in the mild evening air, at first along the pleasant road bordered by charming country-houses, then between golden fields lying in the cool shade of the hills, his vexation soon passed away. An excellent cigar helped to soothe him, so that by the time the ranger's lodge came in sight, he almost regretted that the drive was over so soon.

He had the coachman wait in the main road, and walked up to the house by the bridle path between the young pine trees. The lodge had a friendly air, with the huge pair of antlers over the front door, the setting sun reflected in the windows, and a red glow on the roof.

A young woman whose face seemed familiar to Graesler came down the porch steps to meet him and shook hands with him.

Her mother, she explained, had had an attack of acute indigestion.

"For the last hour," she said, "my mother has been sleeping peacefully. I am sure the fever must have gone, but at four this afternoon her temperature was still just over a hundred. She had been feeling poorly since yesterday evening, so I thought I had better send for you. I hope there is nothing serious the matter."

She looked at him with an air of modest enquiry, as if the further development of the ailment depended upon him.

He met her gaze with due seriousness.

Of course, he recognized her. He had often seen her in the town and supposed she was one of the summer visitors.

"Since your mother is sleeping so quietly," he said, "I do not think there can be any cause for serious anxiety. You had better tell me a little more about the trouble. I should not like to wake the patient needlessly."

She invited him on to the veranda and motioned him to a chair, while she herself stood beside one of the posts of the doorway leading

into the house. In the most direct and circumstantial manner she gave an account of the course of her mother's symptoms. Dr. Graesler felt sure the trouble was only an upset stomach, still he had to ask her about a number of medical details, and was surprised by her simple frankness in referring to the natural processes. He was not used to such freedom from constraint in a girl. Would she have been equally unconcerned, he asked himself, had he been a young man?

He guessed her age to be about twenty-five, although her large, tranquil eyes gave her an expression of greater maturity. In her fair hair, piled up in plaits, she wore a plain silver comb. She was simply dressed, but her white belt was fastened by a handsome gilt clasp. What struck Graesler most of all, even to the point of making him feel a trifle suspicious, were her extremely elegant doe-skin shoes, light-brown in color, precisely matching the stockings she wore.

She had not quite finished her report and Graesler was not yet at the end of his survey, when from within came a call for "Sabine." The doctor rose. Sabine ushered him through the large dining-room, already growing dark, into another and lighter room with two beds in it. The patient was sitting up in bed. She wore a white dressing jacket and a white cap and looked exceedingly well-nourished. Her eyes were clear and friendly, almost merry. They lit up with surprise at seeing the physician.

"Dr. Graesler," introduced Sabine, laying her hand tenderly on her mother's forehead.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, Dr. Graesler." The mother shook her head disapprovingly and turned to Sabine. "But why, dear . . ."

"My visit certainly seems superfluous," remarked Graesler, shaking the patient's proffered hand and holding it to feel her pulse, "especially as your daughter"—he smiled as he spoke—"appears to have an amazing amount of medical knowledge. Still, now that I am here . . ."

With a shrug of her shoulders the patient submitted, and Graesler made an examination, while Sabine looked on calmly and attentively. When it was over, he felt able to reassure both mother and daughter. But a difficulty was encountered when the doctor wished to impose a rigid dietary for the next few days. Sabine's mother protested vigorously.

"I used to take pork and sauerkraut to cure attacks like this, and a special sort of sausage, which alas! is not to be had in this neighborhood. Today I let Sabine keep me from eating a hearty luncheon. That's why I had the attack of fever, I suppose."

Graesler thought she was joking, then realized that the mother was the very opposite of the daughter; she had a thoroughly lay, in fact an heretical view of medical science. She made fun of the virtues of the mineral water of the health resort. Bottles for export, she said, were filled with ordinary water to which salt, pepper, and probably more dubious ingredients were added.

Graesler could not repress a sense of annoyance; he was always inclined to champion the reputation of the spa in which he practised, and felt himself partly responsible for its successes or failures. Yet he refrained from flatly contradicting his patient and contented himself with exchanging a smile of understanding with the daughter. That was enough to justify his own views and maintain his dignity.

After leaving the mother, Dr. Graesler assured Sabine again that she had no cause to be uneasy.

"I thought her condition was not serious," said Sabine. "Still with people who are getting on in years there are possibilities that don't exist in younger persons. That was why I felt I had better send for you, especially as father is away."

"Is he on a tour of inspection?"

"What do you mean?"

"On a tour of inspection through the district?"

Sabine smiled.

"My father is not a forest ranger. This house is still spoken of as the ranger's lodge because up to six or seven years ago the ranger did live here; and my father is called 'the ranger' though he doesn't know a thing about forestry."

"Are you an only child?" asked Graesler. Sabine was accompanying him as though it were a matter of course along the bridle path between the young pine trees.

"No," she said, "I have a brother. He is much younger than I, only just fifteen. When he is home for the holidays, he spends all his time, of course, in the forest. Sometimes he even sleeps in the open." Graesler shook his head disapprovingly. "Oh, that's nothing," she protested, "I used to sleep out of doors myself now and then—not very often."

"Quite close to the house, I hope?" the doctor asked rather anxiously. "Only when you were a little girl, I suppose?" he added hesitatingly.

"Oh no, I was seventeen when we first came to live here. Before that we were in the city—in different cities."

Respecting her reserve, Graesler asked no further questions. They had now reached the carriage road; the driver was there, ready to start. Graesler was impelled to say one word more.

"I think we have met several times in the town?"

"Certainly we have. I have known you by sight for a long time. But weeks often pass without my visiting the town. Last year I exchanged a word or two with your sister when we met casually at Schmidt's. She has come back with you this summer, I suppose?"

The doctor looked down. His gaze happened to fall on Sabine's shoes; he turned his eyes away.

"My sister is not with me," he said. "She died three months ago in Lanzarote."

It hurt, and yet there was a certain consolation in pronouncing the

name of the distant island.

All Sabine said was "Oh."

They stood in silence for a while. Graesler forced his features into a rather formal smile and shook hands with her.

"Good-night, Dr. Graesler."

"Good-night," he answered, and stepped into the carriage.

Sabine stood for a moment until the carriage had started, then turned to go. Graesler glanced back. With slightly bowed head, and without looking round, she glided between the pines. From the house a ray of light shone across the bridle path. A turn in the road, and the picture was blotted out. Graesler leaned back in the carriage and looked up to the heavens; scattered stars glimmered in the cool twilight.

He thought of the long ago, of gayer days when he had had the love of beautiful young women. There had been the civil engineer's widow from Rio-de-Janeiro. At Lisbon she left the steamer of which he was the surgeon, ostensibly to make some purchases in the town, and had never come back though she had had a ticket for Hamburg. He saw her in her black dress driving townward from the docks and nodding amiably to him from the street corner before she vanished for ever.

There had been the lawyer's daughter from Nancy. He had become engaged to her in St. Blasien, the first health resort in which he had practised. Her father was suddenly recalled to France by an important lawsuit. The girl left with her parents, and Graesler never heard from her again.

Next came the memory of Lizzie, a friend of his student days in Berlin, who had shot herself, partly on his account. He remembered the reluctance with which she had shown him the powder-blackened wound beneath the left breast, and how, far from being touched, he had felt only annoyed and bored.

He thought of the charming Henriette, whom for a number of years he used to visit in her cosy little quarters in the upper story of the house overlooking the Alster. He went to see her whenever he returned to Hamburg after one of his long voyages, finding her always as bright, simple, and willing as when he had last seen her—though he never learned, and never troubled to enquire, how she spent the time between his visits.

Many other incidents passed through Graesler's mind, some not altogether agreeable, some even unsavoury, so that he could not but wonder that he had ever gone in for things of that sort. On the whole, though, his feeling was one of regret that youth had passed, and with it the right to expect that life would still lavish its beauties on him.

The carriage rolled on between the fields. The hills looked darker and higher than in the daylight; lights twinkled in the little villas. On a balcony a man and a woman embraced in a more intimate way than

they would have allowed themselves in the light of day. From a veranda, where a small company sat at supper, came the sound of conversation and laughter. Graesler, beginning to feel hungry, looked forward eagerly to his own supper in the "Silver Lion" and told the driver to hurry.

He found the acquaintances whom he usually joined at supper already at table, and drank an extra glass of wine to make life seem sweeter and lighter. For some reason he did not follow his impulse to speak of his visit to the ranger's lodge. The extra glass of wine failed of its usual effect. Graesler rose from the table feeling even more melancholy than when he sat down. A slight headache bothered him on his way home.

CHAPTER THREE

DURING the next few days Dr. Graesler, in the vague expectation of meeting Sabine, went down the main street oftener than usual. Once, during his consultation hours when the waiting-room happened to be empty, he was seized with a sort of presentiment; he went downstairs and took a hasty but fruitless walk to the pump-room and back. That same evening at the supper table he remarked as if casually that he had recently been summoned to the ranger's lodge; then he listened eagerly and a trifle pugnaciously to see if any disparaging word would be let fall concerning Sabine—some such phrase as is apt to be uttered about a woman when men are alone together in jovial mood, though there may be no warrant for the insinuation. There was so little response that Graesler was convinced that none of his friends had the faintest interest in the Schleheim family. There was merely a casual mention that the so-called ranger had some relatives in Berlin, and that the daughter (who had obviously not made a deep impression on Graesler's table companions) used sometimes to stay with them during the winter.

A day or two later, when his work was done, Graesler decided to take a walk to the lodge. From the road he saw the house standing impassive at the edge of the clearing in the forest. On the veranda was a man whose features were not distinguishable at that distance. Graesler felt strongly impelled to go on up to the lodge, say he had happened to be passing that way, and enquire after Frau Schleheim's health. But that, he immediately realized, would hardly be compatible with his professional dignity and might arouse a false impression. So he returned from his excursion more tired and out of spirits than he would have thought possible from so trivial a disappointment.

More days passed, and still he did not meet Sabine in the town. He began to hope, in the interest of his own equanimity, that she had gone away for a time or even for good.

One morning, when he was breakfasting on the balcony with far

less relish than during the first days after his return to the health resort, he was told that a young gentleman wished to see him. Hard upon this announcement a tall, handsome stripling in a bicycling suit appeared on the balcony. In carriage and features he so strongly resembled Sabine that Graesler could not help greeting him as an acquaintance.

"The younger Herr Schleheim?" he said in a tone rather of conviction than enquiry.

"Yes."

"I knew you instantly from your resemblance to—your mother. Won't you sit down? As you see, I have not quite finished breakfast. What's the matter? Is your mother ill again?"

He felt as if he were talking to Sabine.

The lad remained standing, cap in hand.

"My mother's all right, thank you, Dr. Graesler. She's been rather more careful since your scolding."

Graesler smiled, realizing that Sabine, in order to make her own admonitions more effective, had delivered them as coming from the mouth of the doctor.

Perhaps Sabine was the patient this time!

From the unexpected quickening of his pulse Graesler became aware of how much the girl's well-being meant to him. Before he could put the question, the lad said:

"It's father this time."

Graesler was relieved.

"What's the matter with him? Nothing serious, I hope."

"That's what we want to know. He has changed a good deal of late. Perhaps it's not exactly an illness. You see he's getting on, he's fifty-two."

Graesler involuntarily wrinkled his brow, and asked in a rather chilly tone:

"Tell me just what is making you anxious."

"Father's begun to suffer from attacks of dizziness. Yesterday evening, when he was getting up from his chair, he nearly fell down, and had to save himself by holding on to the table. For a long time we've been noticing that when he picks up his glass to drink his hand is shaky."

"Hm." The doctor looked up from his cup. "Perhaps your father handles a glass rather often, and I suppose there's something stronger than water in the glass. . . ?"

The young man was rather embarrassed.

"Sabine thinks that may have something to do with the trouble. Besides, father smokes from morning till night."

"Age doesn't seem to have much to do with his case. Does your father want me to visit him?"

"The matter is not quite so simple. We don't want father to know that you are coming on his account; he won't hear of consulting a

doctor. Sabine wondered whether the thing couldn't be arranged as if you saw him by chance."

"By chance?"

"For instance—if you were to walk past the lodge as you did the other afternoon. Sabine could hail you from the veranda. Then you could come in and—and—oh well, we should see."

The doctor felt his face flush. Stirring in his empty coffee-cup, he said:

"I have very little time for country walks. But you're quite right, I do remember having passed close to the lodge a few days ago."

He recovered his self-possession, looked up, and was glad to see that the young man had apparently noticed nothing. He went on in a professional tone.

"If there is no other way out of the difficulty, I will do what you ask. But you must understand that we shall not get very far with a casual talk on the veranda. I shall need to make a thorough examination before giving an opinion."

"Of course we know that, Dr. Graesler. What we hope is that after a time father will come to consult you of his own accord. But if you could only see him first. . . . Could you manage to come one day soon, directly you are free to get away—to-day, if possible?"

"To-day! I can see her again to-day," thought Graesler. "Delightful!" He consulted his engagement book and shook his head as if faced with insuperable difficulties. Then, with an air of resolution, he struck out an imaginary entry, and on the next page wrote the name that was uppermost in his mind, "Sabine."

"Very well, to-day between half-past five and six," he said coolly but in a cordial tone.

"Oh, thank you."

Graesler rose, cutting the thanks short, asked young Schleheim to remember him to Frau and Fräulein Schleheim, shook hands good-by, and went inside where he watched from the window as the youth came out of the entry with his bicycle, settled his cap more firmly, mounted his wheel, and disappeared round the next corner.

"If I were ten years younger," thought Graesler, "I could fancy that it's all a pretext in Sabine to see me again." He sighed.

Soon after five Graesler started.

He was wearing a light grey suit and still had the mourning band round his left sleeve. He intended to drive to within a short distance of the ranger's house, then get out and walk.

But he had got only a little way beyond the region of the villas when, to his surprise and delight, he saw Sabine and her brother coming to meet him along the path that ran beside the road. He jumped out of the carriage, which was driving at a foot's pace up the hill, and shook hands first with Sabine, then with the lad.

"We're so awfully sorry," began Sabine with slight agitation, "we simply couldn't manage to keep father at home, and he's not likely to

be back until quite late. Please don't be angry with me."

Graesler made an unsuccessful attempt to look annoyed.

"Don't worry," he said lightly, but consulted his watch and wrinkled his forehead as though planning something else for the rest of the day.

On looking up he had to smile to see Sabine and her brother standing there in the footpath like two schoolchildren expecting a scolding. Sabine was wearing a white dress; a broad-brimmed straw hat hung by a yellow ribbon from her left arm. She looked much younger than the first time he saw her.

"On this hot afternoon," said Graesler almost reproachfully, "you walked so far to meet me. You really need not have troubled."

"Dr. Graesler," said Sabine rather embarrassed, "to avoid any misunderstanding—of course this is to be taken as a regular visit. . . ."

Graesler interrupted her:

"That's for me to decide, my dear young lady. The fact is, that even if your scheme had worked, I should not have regarded my visit as a professional one in that sense. You must simply look upon me as a fellow-conspirator."

"But if you take it that way, Dr. Graesler, you will make it impossible for me. . . ."

Graesler broke in again.

"I had intended to go out driving to-day any how. Perhaps you will let me drive you home? Then I can see how Frau Schleheim is getting on."

Graesler felt himself to be quite the man of the world, and made the fleeting resolve to practise in a larger health resort next summer, though so far he had been unsuccessful in the larger places.

"Mother is getting on splendidly," said Sabine. "But if you really have nothing better to do this evening"—she turned to her brother—"how would it be if we showed Dr. Graesler our forest, Karl?"

"Your forest?"

"That's what we call it," said Karl. "It really is ours. None of the patients at the spa ever come so far out. Parts of it are lovely, just like a primeval forest."

"I certainly ought to see it," said Graesler. "I shall be delighted."

The carriage and driver were left near the ranger's lodge, and the three started off Indian file along a path that led at first through a field of wheat as high as a man's head, then across meadowland into the forest.

"Although I've been practising here every season for six years," said Graesler, "I scarcely know anything of the neighborhood. My fate. When I was a ship's surgeon, all I ever saw was the coast, or at most the seaport towns and their immediate environment."

Karl questioned him eagerly about his sea voyages and the lands he had visited. This put Graesler in the position of an experienced traveller, and he answered with an animation and a fancy that were

not always at his command.

It was decided to rest for a while in a clearing which afforded a charming view over the town, where the glass roof of the pump-room glittered in the rays of the setting sun. Karl flung himself on the grass, Sabine sat on a felled tree, Dr. Graesler, afraid of soiling his light suit, remained standing, and continued to hold forth about his travels. His voice, usually rather husky despite frequent clearing of the throat, seemed to him to have acquired a new, or at least unwonted timbre, and his hearers listened to him with a sympathy that he had not enjoyed for many a day.

When the time came to return, he suggested his going back to the lodge and acting as if he had met Karl and Sabine by chance, so that if their father had come back it would be a simple way of opening up an acquaintance with him. Sabine gave a short nod. It was a characteristic little gesture that to the doctor expressed assent more decisively than words could have done.

The way took them down hill by a path which widened as it descended. Karl now did most of the talking, all about the travels and the explorations he intended to make. It was a boy's love of adventure showing itself under the influence of the books he had recently been reading. Graesler was amused, and sooner than he expected they reached the garden hedge of the lodge.

They approached the house from the back. Standing among the tall pines, the white building with its six narrow, uniform windows gleamed dimly through the gathering dusk. On the lawn between the lodge and the hedge stood a long table with a bench and chairs, all made of rough wood.

Karl hurried on to spy out the land, and Graesler was left alone for a time with Sabine, among the pine trees. They looked at one another. The doctor smiled; it was an embarrassed smile. Sabine's expression remained grave, and the doctor, slowly glancing round, remarked: "How peaceful it is here," and gently cleared his throat.

Karl beckoned from one of the open windows.

Graesler assumed a professional mien and followed Sabine through the garden to the veranda, where Karl was telling his father and mother the story of the afternoon encounter.

Graesler, still misled by the designation "ranger," had expected to see a bearded, stocky man in a shooting jacket, and with a pipe in his mouth. He was surprised to find a slender, smooth-shaven gentleman with black, carefully parted hair only just beginning to turn grey. Schleheim's manner was friendly but struck one somehow as histrionic.

Dr. Graesler started a conversation—first about the beauties of the forest, then, by a natural turn, about how slow the health resort was in developing in spite of the loveliness of the surroundings—during which he steadily observed the master of the house. He could not detect anything of note beyond a certain restlessness of the eyes and a frequent twitching of the corners of the mouth as if in scorn.

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When Sabine announced supper, Graesler got up to go. The ranger, with exaggerated cordiality, would not hear of his leaving, and he was soon seated with parents and children at the supper table, lighted by a green-shaded lamp hanging from the rafters.

Graesler asked Sabine whether she ever took part in affairs like the Saturday Club meetings which were soon to begin in the town assembly-rooms.

"Not of late," she replied. "I used to when I was younger—"

At Graesler's smile of protest she added, meaningly it seemed to him:

"I am twenty-seven already."

Herr Schleheim giped at the petty scale of life of the health resort, and dilated with great animation on the charm of great cities and the busy life of the world. From certain of his remarks it became clear that he had been an opera singer until late in his married life. He spoke of actors with whom he had worked, of patrons who had thought highly of him, and of doctors to whose wrong methods of treatment he ascribed the premature loss of his baritone voice. While talking he emptied glass after glass, until suddenly he seemed tired and began to look like an old, worn-out man.

Graesler felt it was time to go.

Sabine and Karl, who accompanied him to the carriage, anxiously asked what he thought of their father.

"I can't say offhand. I'd like to observe him soon again, or better still give him a proper examination. No conscientious physician will make a diagnosis without an examination."

"Don't you think," said Karl to his sister, "that it is a long time since Father has talked as freely as to-night?"

"I do," answered Sabine. With a grateful look at Graesler: "One could see in a moment that he took to you."

The doctor waved aside the implied compliment. At the young people's request he promised to come soon again.

The evening was cool, and the stars shone brightly on the homeward journey. Sabine's confidence in him filled Graesler with satisfaction, all the sweeter since, he felt, it was not inspired solely by his medical skill. Of late years he had often wearied of his work, had felt comparatively indifferent towards his patients, and had even lacked human sympathy with their troubles. Today, after a long interval, he had once again been inspired with a sense of the loftiness of his calling—the calling that he had, to be sure, chosen with enthusiasm in the far-off days of youth though he had not at all times remained inwardly worthy of it.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEXT day, when Dr. Graesler opened the door leading into his

waiting room, he was surprised to see Herr Schleheim among the patients.

"Don't tell my family I have come to consult you," he said the moment he was alone with Graesler in the inner office.

Graesler agreed, and Schleheim did not hesitate to tell of his troubles and submit to an examination. The doctor found no trace of serious bodily disorder, nor could he detect indications of psychical disturbance, though this would not have been surprising in a man compelled in his prime to forsake a brilliant vocation without finding compensation in family affection or in the resources of his own mind.

The opportunity of a frank, open talk obviously did Schleheim good, and he was delighted when the doctor, after telling him he could not be considered a patient, genially suggested he'd come for a visit and a chat at the lodge whenever he happened to be walking in that direction.

When Dr. Graesler called the next Sunday morning, he found the singer alone on the porch. Schleheim hastened to explain that he had thought it better after all to tell "the family" (he always spoke of them collectively).

"I had to," he said, "I had to tell them I had consulted you and you had found nothing seriously wrong with me. They drove me crazy with their worried looks and their tedious talk about my health."

Graesler agreed that the young people's solicitude might have been a trifle exaggerated but praised them for their warmth of feeling.

"Yes, yes," said their father, "I didn't mean to imply that they were anything but good and kind. That is why," he added, "I don't think either of them will get much out of life. Very likely they will never learn anything about it."

A pale memory of discreditable adventures in days long past gleamed in his eyes.

Soon the other members of the Schleheim family arrived, all more or less Sundayfied in their attire with an aspect of middle-class gentility that Graesler had not noticed before. Sabine, apparently conscious of this, hastened to remove her beribboned hat with a sigh of relief, and smoothed her hair.

Graesler stayed to the midday meal. The conversation at table skimmed only on the surface of things. Mention was made of a sanatorium not far from the town whose superintendent meditated retiring. Frau Schleheim asked Graesler whether he wouldn't like the position, seeing it might give him an opportunity systematically to enforce his famous abstinence cures.

Graesler smiled.

"I am not willing to give up my personal freedom," he said. "Though I have practised here for six or seven years in succession, and shall probably continue to practise here several years more, a sense of compulsion would make the place distasteful to me; it would even disturb me in my work."

By a barely perceptible nod, Sabine seemed to express sympathy with his point of view. It appeared, however, that she was well informed regarding the state of affairs at the sanatorium. She said that the superintendent was elderly, and had grown lax of late, but that the place could be made far more profitable than it was.

"I should think," she went on, "that every doctor would prefer to practise at a sanatorium; it's the only way of ensuring a permanent relationship between doctor and patient, and the only way of really controlling a cure."

"There is certainly a good deal in what you say," said Graesler, with the reserve in his tone that seemed appropriate for an expert in lay circles.

Sabine did not miss the note. She blushed slightly and was quick to answer:

"You know I worked for some time as a hospital nurse in Berlin."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the doctor, temporarily at a loss as to his own attitude towards this revelation. He had recourse to vague generalization. "A beautiful, a noble calling. But how dreary and difficult! Your home in this lovely forest must have lured you back soon again."

Sabine made no answer. The others, too, were silent. Graesler felt that the key to the riddle of Sabine's life was almost in his grasp.

After the meal, Karl proposed a game of dominoes in the garden, as if it had been his chartered right. He challenged Graesler, and soon the game clattered on in full swing, while the mother reclined in a comfortable chair beneath the pines and dozed over her needlework. The doctor thought of the gloomy Sunday afternoons he had spent by the side of his melancholy sister—a marvellous escape from a tedious and irksome phase of his life! And when Sabine, noticing his distraction, reminded him by a smile or a gentle nudge that it was his turn to play, the intimate little act aroused in him a vague sentiment of hopefulness.

The dominoes were cleared away, a flowered cloth was spread on the table, and Graesler had a cup of coffee with the others before leaving.

As he walked home, he carried away the memory of a smile from Sabine and a gentle pressure of the hand, which would have charmed away tedium and vexation on even a dustier and hotter road.

Nevertheless, he thought he had better let a considerable interval elapse before revisiting the ranger's lodge. It was easier for him to wait than he had expected; his work had begun to mean more to him, and he was not only very careful in keeping the clinical histories of his patients, but he took pains to fill in the gaps that had gradually formed in his theoretical knowledge by studying medical books and periodicals. It was the influence of Sabine's personality working upon him. He knew it was, yet he would not allow himself to entertain serious hopes of winning the young woman for his wife. Whenever he

dreamed of wooing and winning her and tried to picture life with her at his side, the disagreeable figure of the hotel manager at Lanzarote would come cropping up. There he'd be, welcoming the almost elderly doctor and his young wife with an impertinent smile. The spectre was persistent, as if Lanzarote were the one place in the world where Graesler could possibly practise in the winter, and as if the hotel manager were the one mortal who could imperil the happiness of his wedded life.

One morning at the end of the week Graesler met Sabine shopping.

"Why haven't we seen you for so long?" she asked.

"So few people come to the lodge, and those who do seldom have anything sensible to say. Next time you must tell us more about yourself and your adventures. We'd love to hear about them." A look of quiet yearning lit up her eyes.

"If you think life out in the world so very interesting, then why do you shut yourself up here?"

"Things may change," she answered simply. "In fact my life was once a little different. Still at present I wouldn't want anything better."

The light of yearning in her eyes died out.

CHAPTER FIVE

GRAESLER prepared for his next visit to the ranger's lodge by searching his memory for incidents worth recounting. He was rather disappointed to find that a life that had outwardly seemed fairly eventful should be so barren of real content. Still a few things had happened that fairly resembled adventures and might make interesting stories. On a South Sea island there had been an attack by the natives and one of the mates of the steamer had been killed; a pair of lovers had committed suicide on the high seas; a cyclone had struck his steamer in the Indian Ocean; once he had landed at a Japanese port which had been devastated the day before by an earthquake; and once he had spent a night in an opium den. (The story of the wind-up of this episode would certainly have to be expurgated for the family circle.) Then there were a number of patients at various health resorts to tell about. He remembered them fairly well—bounders, eccentrics, a Russian grand duke who had been murdered and had had a pre-sentiment of his end.

A chance question from Karl gave Graesler his opening. It was on a soft summer evening as he stood leaning idly against the porch railing at the lodge. Many of his fainter memories, he noticed as he talked, grew clearer and livelier, and all sorts of things that he had thought forgotten welled up from the depths of his being. Once he even had a shock of surprise to find himself exercising a hitherto unsuspected talent; he found himself inventing whenever his memory

failed. Should he be glad or sorry? Well, he wouldn't blame himself too much. His little lies were bringing him a long-denied pleasure; he was for a time the central figure of a sympathetic circle; and in the dreamy peace of the ranger's lodge, his telling of the tales aroused in his own mind seductive echoes of vanished days.

On a subsequent visit, when Sabine and her mother were receiving visitors in the garden—a rare occurrence—Graesler sat on the veranda with Schleheim, who rattled on in lively fashion concerning his former activities in municipal theatres and the opera houses of the lesser courts. Schleheim's persistent implication was that he had cause to regret the variety and splendor of his earlier life. After he had lost his voice, his father-in-law, a well-to-do wine merchant in the Rhineland, had given him the chance of going into business, but he had preferred a retreat to nature and solitude, where he would not be constantly reminded, as he would have been in a town, of what he had lost, and where there was nothing to hinder his enjoyment of all that was left to him. There in the lodge he could make the most of the pleasures of domesticity—he spoke with a tang of irony—and the admirable qualities of his children (which he again almost seemed to deplore).

"If only Sabine," he said gloomily, "had inherited my artistic temperament along with my talents, she would have had a splendid future."

Graesler learned from Schleheim that for a time Sabine had made her home in Berlin with her mother's relatives—"middle-class sort of people"—and had studied singing and dramatic art, but had given them up because she was disgusted by the somewhat loose moral tone of her fellow-students.

"Fräulein Sabine," said Graesler with an assenting nod, "has a really pure soul."

"Oh yes! But what good is it compared with the immense advantage of knowing life in all its heights and depths? Isn't that better than keeping one's soul pure?" Schleheim looked into the distance, and continued in a depressed tone: "So, one fine day she threw over all her plans, or rather all my plans, for art and fame, and took up nursing—with a sense of the contrast, I'm sure. She was suddenly inspired with the belief that nursing was her peculiar vocation."

Graesler shook his head.

"Nursing doesn't seem to have satisfied her either. I understand she gave it up too after a few years?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," answered Schleheim. "She became engaged to a young doctor, an able man, I believe, with excellent prospects. I never had the chance of meeting him—" Karl came to announce that coffee was being served under the pines—Schleheim ended rapidly under his breath: "Unfortunately the young man died."

"Died," Graesler repeated, with not a trace of sympathy in his tone. He stared into space.

The doctor was introduced to the visitors, a widow and her two daughters, both younger than Sabine. They knew one another by sight, and a lively conversation set in over the coffee-cups.

"We see you go by every afternoon, Dr. Graesler, punctually at a quarter to three," said one of the girls. "We'll be sitting at the window sewing, and you'll come out of the hotel, and take out your watch and hold it to your ear, and shake your head, and then hurry home."

"What on earth is there so important for you to do?" asked the younger girl, her eyes dancing merrily. "Don't tell me you always have patients waiting for you. I shan't believe it. Invalids never come to this so-called health resort. You know they don't. The interesting young man they wheel up and down in a bath-chair in front of the pump-room is hired by the management. He is really an actor from Berlin and plays the invalid here every summer in return for board and lodging. And the smart lady with the seventeen hats who's an American or Australian by the visitors' list, is just as good a European as the rest of us. When she was sitting on a bench in the public garden the other day talking to the officer in mufti who had come over from Eisenach to see her, she was not speaking English, but unmistakable Viennese."

Graesler made no attempt to prove the genuineness of the American lady, who was the patient of another doctor, but he was able to vouch for a French married couple, who had travelled everywhere and thought this the most beautiful spot in the world.

That led to general praise of the loveliness of the forest and the hills, and the cosiness of the little town, which was at its best when the visitors had left.

"You really ought to spend a winter here," said Frau Schleheim, turning to the doctor, "then you'd know what a charming place it is."

Graesler made no answer, but in his eyes were mirrored distant scenes which the others had not visited and were never likely to visit.

Some one proposed a stroll. On the walk, the others kept together at the outset; but soon, as if by design, Graesler was given a chance of going on ahead with Sabine, Herr Schleheim not being one of the party. He had preferred to stay at home and read a history of the French revolution—an epoch in which he claimed to have a special interest.

Graesler felt surer of himself to-day in Sabine's company, superior, more intimate. Having lost a betrothed to whom she might have been closer than her father and mother supposed, she might be looked upon as a young widow. That would help to bridge the difference in age between her and himself.

The pleasant day closed to the tunes from the town orchestra on the broad terrace outside the Kurhaus, where they took supper together. Herr Schleheim joined them at supper again, looking so elegant, in fact, so foppish that Graesler could not but feel an inconsistency with the Schleheim who was so deeply interested in the

French revolution. Sabine's girl friends jokingly admired his appearance, while Sabine—if Graesler rightly interpreted her glance—did not find her father's garb wholly to her taste. But every one was in high spirits, and the younger girl had plenty of sly digs to poke at the other diners on the terrace. She promptly discovered the lady with the seventeen hats, who was seated at an adjoining table with three young men and one older man and nodded her head in time with a Viennese waltz in a way that was certainly not the custom in Australia.

When Dr. Graesler felt a foot gently touch his for an instant he was almost startled. Was it Sabine? No, it could not have been; he was far from wishing anything of the kind. It must have been the merry girl opposite with a particularly innocent air. The soft contact was momentary, probably accidental. It was characteristic that Graesler preferred to accept this explanation, yet with little satisfaction. Excessive modesty, a certain self-deprecation was his worst fault; otherwise, at his age he would not still have been practising in a ridiculous little health resort; he would be holding an official position in a place like Wiesbaden or Ems. Though Sabine looked at him from time to time with obvious friendliness, and once raised her glass to him, smiling, the wine he drank again only increased his melancholy.

By degrees his low spirits seemed to infect the whole company. The two elder ladies showed signs of fatigue, the young girls' flow of conversation was arrested; the singer, in a brown study, silently smoked a big cigar. When the company finally broke up, Graesler felt he had never been so lonely in his life.

CHAPTER SIX

FRAU SCHLEHEIM, as was to be expected, came back with an upset stomach from Berlin where she had gone to take Karl at the end of his vacation. Dr. Graesler was called in again, with the result that he formed the habit of visiting the ranger's lodge every evening, and kept up the visits even after his patient had recovered. Often he spent hours alone with Sabine, sometimes in the house or out walking. Her parents, probably suspecting an understanding between the two that was by no means distasteful to them, usually kept out of the way.

Graesler talked to Sabine of his youth, of his native city, ancient, many-towered, and surrounded by a wall; of the house where his father and mother used to live, an old-fashioned place, where the rooms were always ready for him (and until recently had been ready for his sister) for a brief visit in the spring or autumn. Sabine listened sympathetically, and he could not but let his fancy play with the idea of how delightful it would be if he and she were to go back home together. He thought of how surprised his old friend Böhlinger, the lawyer,

would be—the only person who still formed a sort of tie between himself and his native town.

Autumn began early that year, and with unusual vigor, and most of the health-seekers had fled. Graesler, finding that all the hours except those he spent at the ranger's lodge hung heavy on his hands, was so alarmed at the prospect of resuming his lonely, meaningless, barren, unsettled life, that he sometimes felt quite determined to make a formal proposal for Sabine's hand. Lacking the courage to ask her in plain terms, he chose a roundabout way. He set to work to make serious enquiries about Dr. Frank's sanatorium. Sabine had mentioned it to him a second time. And he went to visit the proprietor, with whom he was acquainted.

Frank was an apathetic old fellow. He wore a dirty, yellow overall and looked, as he sat smoking a pipe on a white bench in front of the sanatorium, more like a queer sort of farmer than a doctor. Graesler asked him point-blank whether there was any truth in the rumor that he wanted to dispose of the institution. Frank, it seemed, had merely dropped a hint here and there of his intention to retire, and had really been waiting for a sign.

"The sooner I can get rid of the place," he said, "the better pleased I shall be. I haven't many years to look forward to, and I should like to spend them as far away as possible from real and imaginary invalids. I have had to tell a hundred thousand lies during my professional career, and I'm sick of it. You can take it on all right," he continued, "you are still a young chap"—an assertion which Graesler countered with a melancholy gesture of dissent.

Frank led him over the building. Graesler was sorry to find that it was even more neglected and decayed than he had feared. Worse than that, the few patients he met in the garden, the corridors, and the inhalation-room, had a discontented and unhappy look, and their attitude towards the superintendent seemed to be suspicious, if not positively hostile. But when he came to the little balcony of the superintendent's dwelling-house, looking beyond the garden across the charming valley towards the gently rising mist-clad hills on the other side (where the ranger's lodge lay), he suddenly felt his heart go out in yearning toward Sabine. For the first time he frankly admitted to himself that his feeling for her was love. How delightful it would be to stand with his arm around her on this very spot, and hand over to her as his wife and helpmate the whole property which by then he would have had renovated and embellished. He had to keep a tight hand on himself and leave without coming to terms with Dr. Frank, who, for his part, preserved his wonted indifference in the matter.

At the ranger's lodge that evening, Graesler thought it best to say nothing of his visit to the sanatorium; but the very next day he asked his friend Adelmann, the architect who was one of his daily companions at supper in the "Silver Lion," to come with him and give an expert's opinion on Frank's place. It proved that the repairs needed

would be less extensive and less costly than Graesler had feared. Adelmann was confident that the sanatorium could be made as good as new by May 1st next year. In his attitude toward Dr. Frank and his terms Graesler continued to hesitate, though Adelmann, when the two had come away together, strongly advised him to conclude the advantageous bargain.

That same evening, warm as summer again, Graesler was seated with Sabine and her parents on the veranda of the ranger's lodge. He began to speak, as if casually, of his conversation with Dr. Frank, pretending that Frank had happened to come out of the gate of the sanatorium when Graesler and the architect were passing by.

Herr Schleheim also thought the terms excellent and advised Graesler to give up the idea of practising that winter in the south, and to concentrate his attention on the important affair here at hand. But Graesler would not hear of this. It would be impossible, he said, for him to wind up his affairs in Lanzarote without another visit; and he would have no anxiety about the repairs and renovations at the sanatorium if they were in the hands of anyone so trustworthy as his friend Adelmann.

Sabine intervened in her simple and direct fashion.

"Why shouldn't I supervise the work while you are away? I'd send you regular reports."

Soon after this the parents, as if by concerted arrangement, disappeared into the house, and Sabine and Graesler, following what by now had become their custom, strolled up and down the avenue. Sabine had a number of excellent proposals to make regarding the renovation of the old building. Apparently she had been turning the matter over in her mind. "You'll need a lady, a real lady," she insisted, "as matron of the establishment. That chiefly is what the place has lacked of late years—social supervision, the sort that only a true lady can give."

Graesler's heart beat fast. The decisive word had been spoken; he had been given his cue. He believed he was about to make the appropriate response when Sabine, as if divining his intention, added rather hurriedly:

"An advertisement will be the best way of finding what you want. If I were you, I'd even go on a trip on the chance of securing the right person for so important a position. You've plenty of time on your hands just now. I suppose your patients have all gone home? . . . When are you yourself thinking of leaving?"

"In—four or five days. First of all, of course, I have to go home, to my home town, I mean. My friend Böhlinger, my lawyer, writes that there are several matters he must discuss with me regarding my sister's estate. Before I leave, I shall visit the sanatorium again and go into everything most carefully. But I shall not be able to come to a final decision without consulting Böhlinger."

He went on talking at random, guardedly and awkwardly, and profoundly dissatisfied with his own behavior. The occasion demanded

clearness and resolution, he told himself. Sabine was persistently silent; so he thought it best to plead a professional engagement and leave. He held Sabine's hand a few moments, then raised it to his lips and kissed it fervently. She made no attempt to withdraw it, and when he looked up he thought her expression seemed more contented, even brighter.

He mustn't say anything more. He let go her hand, got into the carriage, wrapped the rug round his knees, and motioned to the driver to start. Sabine still stood where he had left her, motionless in the pale light. She wasn't looking at him as he drove off—was she? Apparently not. She seemed to be staring into the void of the night.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NEXT morning there was a cheerless drizzle. Joylessly, simply as a matter of duty, Graesler went to make a third inspection of the sanatorium. He was taken around by a very youthful medical assistant who was exceedingly polite out of respect, not so much to the senior colleague as to the person who seemed likely to be the new superintendent and proprietor. The young man seized every opportunity to indicate his familiarity with the most up-to-date therapeutic methods, and was loud in regrets that under present conditions there were no means of applying them in the institution.

To Graesler the whole place seemed even more neglected than it had done the day before, the garden even more of a wilderness. When he went to Dr. Frank's office, he found the superintendent in a badly furnished room just beginning his breakfast, amid a litter of bills and other business documents. Graesler told him he couldn't come to a final decision that morning and matters would have to stand over for about three weeks until he returned from his home town. Frank listened with his habitual apathy, merely remarking that in that case he should naturally feel at liberty to entertain other offers.

Walking back to town through the rain Graesler had a sense of renewed freedom. His umbrella dripped, the hills were shrouded in fog, it was cold, his fingers were nipped, he had to put on his gloves—a rather awkward job when you're also trying to hold up an umbrella. He shook his head disapprovingly. Now that he had grown used to a southern climate would he ever be able to accustom himself to passing a whole winter in this miscalled temperate zone? He almost wished it were possible to tell Sabine that very evening that the sanatorium had been snapped up by a brisker purchaser—and that Graesler wished him joy of his bargain!

On his return to his rooms he found a letter addressed in Sabine's handwriting. His heart seemed to stop beating. What could she have to write to him about? There was only one possibility. She must be

asking him to discontinue his visits. That kissing of her hand yesterday—he had been sure of it in an instant—had spoiled the whole affair. It was not the sort of thing that came gracefully from him. He must have looked a perfect fool. Hardly knowing how, Graesler opened the envelope, and read the letter.

“Dear Friend, I may call you that, mayn’t I? You are coming to see me again this evening, but I want you to get this letter first. For, unless I write to you, perhaps you will go away this evening again just as you have done all these days and evenings, and will go on your trip without having spoken a word, persuading yourself that you have acted wisely. There is nothing left but for me to speak—or rather, since I cannot bring myself to speak, for me to write out my mind to you.

“Well, then, dear Dr. Graesler, my dear friend Dr. Graesler, here I am writing to you, and you will read what I have written, will perhaps find it not unwelcome, and will, I hope, not consider me unwomanly because I feel that I can write to tell you that I should not take it amiss were you to ask me to be your wife. There you have it in plain terms. I should like to marry you. I feel a great, cordial friendship for you such as I have not felt for any human being before. Not love—not yet. But something akin to love, and something which may very well grow into love. During these last days, whenever you spoke of your impending journey, I had quite a strange feeling at my heart.

“This evening, when you kissed my hand, it was lovely. But then, when you drove away into the darkness, I felt as if all were over, and as if you were never coming back again.

“Of course that mood has passed. Those were only night thoughts. I know you are coming again. You will be here to-morrow evening. I know, too, that you like me just as much as I like you. One feels such things before they have found expression in words.

“But it seems to me sometimes that you are a little lacking in self-confidence. You are, aren’t you? I have been wondering why. I think it must be because you have never struck roots anywhere, and because in your whole life you have never stayed anywhere long enough to allow some one to make a strong impression on your heart. I think that must be the reason.

“But perhaps there is another cause for your hesitation. I don’t find it easy to write about, yet, now that I have begun, I must go on. You know, I was once engaged to be married. Four years ago. He was a doctor, like yourself. My father probably told you about him. I loved him deeply. It was a terrible blow to me when he died. He was so young, only twenty-eight. I thought, as people always do then, that I should never get over it.

“But he was not my first love. Before that, I had a passion for a singer. That was when my father, with the best intentions in the world, was trying to force me into a career for which I was not naturally fitted. My fondness for the singer was the most passionate feeling I have ever experienced. But ‘experienced’ is not the right word; I ought to say

‘felt’. The whole thing ended rather stupidly. The man fancied he had to do with the same sort of creature that he was used to in his own circle, and behaved accordingly. I refused to have anything more to do with him.

“The strange thing is that I think of him much oftener than of my betrothed, of whom I was so fond.

“We were engaged for six months. That brings me to something which I find it rather difficult to speak of. Do you know what I imagine? You suspect what is not true; that is why you hesitate. Of course, it is a proof of the depth of your feeling for me. But at the same time it is—forgive me—to some extent a sign of priggishness or vanity. Doubtless vanity and priggishness on this particular point are common in men. Let me assure you, you need not entertain the suspicion. Must I speak more plainly? Well—I have no confessions to make regarding my past. When I look back upon my relation with my betrothed, I realize it was rather a strange one. In the whole six months I don’t believe he kissed me more than a dozen times.

“In the night time, you see, one can write out one’s heart to a good friend—especially when one reflects that the letter need not be sent after all. Besides, of what use would the letter be unless I were frank and wrote everything that came into my head.

“I loved him dearly, for the very reason that he was so grave, so tinged with melancholy. He was one of those rare doctors to whom all the suffering they witness becomes matter for personal suffering. Seeing that he took life so hardly, how could he pluck up heart to be happy? My dream was that I should be able to teach him. Fate willed otherwise. You shall see his photograph. Of course I have one.

“I have not kept the singer’s photograph. He didn’t give it to me. I bought it before I met him.

“How I do run on! It is past midnight. I am still sitting at my writing table with no wish to come to an end. I hear my father pacing the room below. He has such restless nights now. We have troubled ourselves very little about him lately. You and I, I mean. This must not continue.

“Oh, here is another matter—a proposal you must take in the spirit in which it is meant. About the sanatorium. My father says that if you cannot at the moment put your hand on the purchase money, he is quite ready to help you out. In fact, I think he would like to have a share in the business.

“While we are on the subject of the sanatorium, and if you understand what I am driving at in this letter (I have made my meaning fairly plain!), you can perhaps save yourself the trouble of the advertisements and the journeys; I can confidently recommend myself for the position of matron.

“Don’t you think it would be delightful. Dr. Graesler, if we were to work together in the institution as comrades—I had almost written ‘as colleagues’!

“Let me confess, I have been interested in the sanatorium a long time. Longer than its future superintendent. . . . The position and the grounds are lovely. It is such a pity that Dr. Frank has allowed everything to go to rack and ruin. Another mistake is that for some time he has been accepting any patients that offered, without caring whether they were suitable cases or not. It seems to me the place should be reserved for the treatment of nervous diseases—excluding serious mental cases.

“Why should I write all this? These suggestions could very well wait till to-morrow, whether or not we come to an understanding upon the main point of the letter.

“Perhaps you may make it one object of your journey to push the interests of the sanatorium in Berlin and other large towns. When I was a nurse, I got to know some of the Berlin consultants, and perhaps they will remember me. I can see you smiling at this. Never mind. My letter is no ordinary one. An ill-natured man might say something about a woman forcing herself on him, but you are not ill-natured and will not think the worse of me.

“Though my feeling for you is not romantic, it is very real. Partly too, I am sorry for your loneliness. Most probably I should never have written you this letter if your sister had still been alive. And perhaps I am fond of you because I admire you as a doctor. Yes, I really do. Some people might find your professional manner a little cold. But that is only your way. Fundamentally, you are sympathetic and good. The essential thing is that you inspire confidence in your patients, as you did in Mother first, and then in Father—and that is how it all began!

“When you come to-morrow, I will make it easy for you. You need merely smile, or kiss my hand again as you kissed it on parting this evening, and then I shall know it is all right.

“Otherwise, if things are not as I fancy, say so bluntly. You need not be afraid. We shall shake hands on it. I shall cherish the memory of the pleasant hours we have had together this summer, and I shall tell myself not to be presumptuous, or to plume myself any longer on the idea of being Frau Doktor or even Frau Direktor—dignities which do not, in truth, allure me so very, very much.

“Please note, too, that if you should marry some one else, if next year you should bring back from Lanzarote as wife some beautiful American or Australian (warranted genuine!), my offer to supervise the building work at the sanatorium holds good, should you take the place over from Dr. Frank. These are two fundamentally distinct proposals.

“Well, it is really time for me to stop. I am quite curious to know whether I shall decide tomorrow morning to send you this letter. What do you think?

“Good-by. Till we meet!

“My love to you. Whatever happens, I shall still be

DR. GRAESLER

Your friend,
Sabine.”

Dr. Graesler sat long over this letter. He reread it, and then read it a third time, and was still uncertain whether its contents made him happy or sad.

This much was clear, that Sabine was willing to marry him. To use her own words, she almost forced herself on him. Yet, as she herself admitted, the feeling that moved her was not love. She regarded him with too discerning, he might even say, too critical, an eye. She had correctly observed that he was priggish, vain, cold, irresolute—qualities he didn’t deny in himself, but Sabine would scarcely have noticed or spoken about them had he been ten or fifteen years younger.

He could not but ask himself:

“If my faults are so obvious to her at long range and she doesn’t forget to touch upon them even in her letter, what will happen later, in the intimacy of daily life, when many other faults of mine will inevitably come to light? I shall constantly have to be on the watch, minding my P’s and Q’s. I shall have to play a part; which at my age will be far from easy. And it won’t be easy to transform a morose, priggish, comfortably set-in-his-ways old bachelor into a charming, gallant young husband. Things might go on all right for a time. Sabine is certainly sympathetic toward me, you might almost say maternally tender. But how long would that last? Not long. Until some devil of a singer, or a melancholy young doctor, or some other seductive male should turn up to win the favors of the pretty young wife. And the winning of the favors would be all the easier as marriage would have ripened her and given her experience.”

The clock struck half-past one—long past meal time.

“Bother!” thought Graesler, and conscious, with a fierce obstinacy, of his priggish exactness, he hurried to the inn. At table he found the architect and one of the municipal councillors sitting in their corner over the coffee and cigars. The councillor nodded meaningfully to the doctor.

“I hear we have to congratulate you.”

“What for?” said Graesler, startled.

“You’ve bought Dr. Frank’s sanatorium, haven’t you?”

Graesler gave a sigh of relief.

“Bought it? Not yet, nowhere near it yet. It depends upon all sorts of things. The old hulk is in terrible disrepair, it practically needs rebuilding. And our friend here”—he was studying the bill of fare and lightly indicated the architect—“runs up the costs—”

Adelmann protested hotly: he didn’t want to make money from the work, and the buildings were not as bad as Graesler represented.

“If the contracts are made at once, the place will be as good as new by May 15th at the latest.”

Graesler shrugged his shoulders. He reminded the architect that

the day before he had said May 1st at the latest.

“Besides,” he said, “you know as well as I do that building never proceeds according to program. There are always delays, and the costs always mount higher than the estimate. I don’t feel fresh enough to go in for such things. On top of it all, Frank is asking a ridiculous price. How do I know”—he meant this in fun—“how do I know, Mr. Architect, whether you aren’t working hand in glove with him?”

Adelmann flared up, the councillor tried to smooth matters over, Graesler apologized, but harmony was not to be restored. The two men soon got up to go with a cool good-by, leaving Graesler alone to his dissatisfaction with himself.

Graesler hurried back home without touching the last course. A patient about to leave the health resort was there awaiting final instructions for the winter. The doctor prescribed the regimen inattentively and impatiently, and when the fee was handed him he accepted it with an uneasy conscience, annoyed, not only with himself, but also with Sabine, because in her letter she had not omitted to accuse him of indifference toward his patients.

He went out on the balcony and relighted his cigar. The garden looked miserable, but there, in spite of the poor weather, was his housekeeper sitting on a white bench as she did every day at this hour, with her work-basket beside her and knitting in her hands. Three or four years ago the elderly person had certainly had designs upon him. At least, Friederike had repeatedly said so. But then Friederike had always believed that her brother was surrounded by maids and widows eager to marry who lay in wait to pounce upon him. Heaven knows he had had many a narrow escape.

But he was born to be a bachelor. All his life he had been an eccentric, an egoist, an old fogey. Even Sabine had become aware of this. Her letter showed she had, with compelling clearness, even though for various reasons, least among which was love, she had flung herself, metaphorically speaking, into his arms. But if she had really flung herself into his arms, the whole thing would have worn a different aspect. The letter rustling in his coat pocket was anything but a love letter.

The carriage that came every day to take Graesler to the ranger’s lodge was announced. His heart beat faster. He couldn’t conceal from himself that there was only one thing for him to do—go to Sabine as fast as he could, take the dear hands that had been so heartily and unreservedly held out to him, and ask the sweet creature to marry him—even at the risk of losing his happiness again at the end of a few years or even months.

But instead of rushing down stairs, he remained as if rooted to the spot. Something—something, he felt, must first be cleared up in his mind once and for all. What could it be? Ah, now he had it. He must first read Sabine’s letter through again.

He went to the consulting room, where he could quietly let what

she said work its influence upon him.

He read slowly, with strained care, and at every word felt his heart grow colder. Every thing warm and fond in the letter willy-nilly seemed cold, even mocking. When he came to the passages in which Sabine touched on his reserve, his vanity, his priggishness, she seemed intentionally repeating the things she had already reproached him with in the morning, unjustly and *ad nauseam*. How could it occur to her to call him a prig, an old fogey when he had been ready, gladly ready, to pardon her without question if she had been guilty of a digression from the straight path. So far from divining this in even the slightest degree, she attributed his holding back to just that. Shows how little she knew him! Exactly. She didn't understand him.

Here was a new light shed upon the whole riddle of his existence. No one had ever really understood him, neither man nor woman. Not his parents, nor his sister, nor his colleagues, nor his patients. His reserve was taken for coldness, his sense of order for priggishness, his seriousness, for dryness. That was why, being a man without either dash or sparkle, he was destined to lifelong solitude. And just because he was that sort of man and because he was so many years older than Sabine, he neither could nor ought to accept the happiness she was ready to bring him—or believed she was ready to bring him—the happiness that would probably be Dead Sea fruit.

He snatched up a sheet of writing paper.

"Dear Fräulein Sabine," he began, "Your letter has stirred me profoundly. How can I thank you, I who am a lonely and elderly man. . . ."

"Nonsense!" he thought, tore up the letter and made a fresh start.

"My dear Sabine:

"I have received your letter, your good, lovely letter. It has moved me to the core. How can I thank you? You reveal the possibility of a happiness I had hardly dared to dream of. And not having dared to dream of it I don't dare either to grasp it—at least not right away. Give me a few days. Let me come to the consciousness of my happiness. And you, Sabine, ask yourself again whether you really and truly want to entrust your gracious youth to me, a mature man.

"It is a good thing, perhaps, that I must go back, as you know, to my home city. I mean now to go sooner—to-morrow morning, instead of Thursday. So we shan't see each other for about two weeks. That will give time for everything to settle itself in your mind and mine.

"Unfortunately I can't express myself as beautifully as you do. If only you could read my heart. But I know you won't misunderstand. I think I'd better not visit the lodge to-day. This letter will be my good-by instead—my good-by for a few days. May I write to you while I am away, and will you write me? My address will be 17 Burggraben.

"As I said, I will confer with my lawyer about the sanatorium. So for the present I won't take up your father's kind offer. Give him my sincerest thanks. Besides it may be well to get the advice of an outside architect. This is not a slur, though, on the one here. But all this can

be considered later.

“Good-by, Sabine. Give my kind regards to your parents. Tell them an urgent telegram from my lawyer has called me away a few days earlier. In two weeks then. I hope to find everything unchanged when I come back. With what impatience I shall await your answer. Now I must close. I thank you. I kiss your dear hands. Till we meet again. To our next happy meeting.

“Your friend,
“Emil Graesler.”

He folded the letter. Several times, writing it, he had felt tears in his eyes from a vague emotion on his own account and Sabine’s. But now that he had reached a temporary decision, his eyes were dry, and he was perfectly composed when he handed the letter to the driver with instructions to deliver it at the ranger’s lodge. From the window, he watched the carriage start off. He was about to call to the man to turn back, but the words died on his lips, and soon the carriage was out of sight.

Graesler then set about preparing for the journey. There was little time and so much to do and think of that his mind was wholly engrossed for a while; but when, a little later, it occurred to him that by now the letter must be in Sabine’s hands, he had a real physical hurt at his heart. Would she send an answer right away? Or would she just get into the carriage and come to fetch her irresolute lover? Ah, then indeed she’d have to say that she really was throwing herself at him.

But her love wasn’t strong enough to stand such a test. She did not come. Nor did an answer to his letter come. At dusk he saw the carriage drive by with a chance fare inside.

That night he slept badly, and the next morning it was a chilly, depressed Dr. Graesler that drove to the station with the rain rattling down sharply on the hood of the open carriage.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AN agreeable surprise was awaiting Dr. Graesler at home. Though it was at the eleventh hour that he had sent notice of his coming, he found his rooms not only in perfect order, but far more comfortably furnished than at his last visit. He realized why. In the previous autumn Friederike had stayed alone in the apartment for a few days and later had told him that she had bought new furniture and had arranged with good workmen for decorations and repairs. Throughout the winter she had kept up a correspondence with Böhlinger about the execution of the orders. When Graesler went through the apartment the second time and came to the room giving upon the courtyard which had been his sister’s, he sighed gently, partly in deference to his caretaker, a compositor’s wife, who accompanied him, and also in honest mourning. What a pity, he thought,

that his sister could not have seen the familiar room in its new pleasant furnishing and lighted by electricity.

Graesler unpacked, interrupting the work every now and then to roam through the flat, take down a book from the shelves, put it back unread, and look down at the narrow, almost deserted street, where the lamp at the corner was mirrored in the wet pavement. Then he sat down before the writing table in the chair that he had inherited from his father and read the newspaper. To his sorrowful surprise he found himself feeling far, far away from Sabine. Not only that he was separated from her by space. More than that—the letter in which she had offered herself to him and which had made him take to flight, seemed to have reached him, not yesterday, but many weeks before. When he took it out of his pocket, it seemed to breathe out something sharp and disturbing. It made him nervous. Afraid he might be tempted to read it again, he locked it up in a drawer.

Next morning he didn't know what to do with himself either that day or in the days to follow. He had long been a stranger in his native town; some of his former friends were dead, and the ties with those who remained had been gradually loosened, though his sister, whenever they came back, had usually gone to call upon the elderly folk who had belonged to their parents' circle. As a matter of fact, Graesler had no other business here than the talk with Böhlinger. But even that was not urgent.

The first thing he did was what he always did when he had been away a long time; he took a long walk all over the city. Usually, in fact regularly, he had experienced a sort of gentle, soothing melancholy. This time, under the gray leaden sky, no such feeling stirred him. With no emotion of any sort, he passed the house from whose tall, narrow turret window his boyhood sweetheart had greeted him with stolen nods and smiles as he went by on his way to the high school. The murmur of the fountain playing in the autumn-tinted park left him unmoved—the park he himself had seen developed from the old town moat. He visited the courtyard of the famous Town Hall, then rounded the corner to where in a narrow alley stood an ancient, dilapidated building. Yes, there was the place, with shades half drawn and the indicative red curtains behind which he had had his first pitiful adventure followed by weeks of terror. Nothing but dusty, misty shreds seemed to rise up from his boyhood days.

The first person he spoke to was the white-bearded tobacconist of whom he bought his cigars. The man in a long-winded way commiserated him on his sister's death. Graesler hardly knew how to answer. He left the shop in dread of meeting other acquaintances and having to listen to the same meaningless phrases. But the next friend did not recognize him, and the third friend, who looked as if he meant to stop and talk, received a hasty greeting that was barely civil.

After luncheon, which he took in a familiar old inn (now extravagantly redecorated), Graesler went to see Böhlinger. The lawyer, who

had already been informed of his arrival in the town, greeted him with quiet friendliness, said a few words of condolence, and asked for details of Friederike's death. Graesler lowered his eyes and told the story of the tragedy in a subdued voice. Looking up he was rather amazed to see a fat old man sitting opposite him. In the doctor's memory, Böhlinger's face had always remained youthful; now it looked sallow and worn. The lawyer was obviously moved. For a long time he sat silent, then shrugged his shoulders and turned to his desk as if to say that there was nothing for the living to do after such an awful event but to set themselves resolutely to the tasks immediately before them.

He took out Friederike's will and other important papers and proceeded to explain about her estate. Graesler was her sole heir, and her savings amounted to a good deal more than he had expected. As Böhlinger made plain, Graesler could, if he wanted to, be able from now on to live upon his private income modestly but comfortably without having to practise medicine.

The very disclosure of this possibility made the doctor realize that for him the day of retirement had not yet come; he felt he had been born with a vigorous impulse to activity. He said so to Böhlinger and told him about the sanatorium and how far the negotiations for its purchase had advanced.

The lawyer went into the matter in detail. At first he seemed inclined to approve the plan, then hesitated about advising Graesler to go ahead with it. More than mere medical skill, he pointed out, would be necessary. For one thing the head of the institution would also have to have ease of social intercourse. This he allowed Graesler possessed in an eminent degree. For another thing he required business ability, and business ability was something Graesler had not yet had the opportunity to display.

The doctor had to admit Böhlinger was right and wondered whether it would not be well to tell him about Miss Schleheim, who would be quite equal to the business end of things. But the old bachelor of a lawyer would be the last person in the world to understand so peculiar an affair of the heart. Graesler knew he never missed a chance to speak slightly, even cynically of women, and he wouldn't trust himself to listen quietly to a flippant remark about Sabine.

Böhlinger had not kept secret from Graesler the reason why he had so low an opinion of women. Once a year a masked ball was held in the town at which burgher society rubbed shoulders with the stage and even with persons of a more dubious moral standing. At one of these balls, Böhlinger, quite casually, had enjoyed the last favors of a lady whom no one would have dreamt of suspecting of such wanton conduct. She kept her mask on even in the intoxication of passion and believed that the secret of her identity had been preserved. By a strange chance, however, Böhlinger learned who she was, but he kept the name of the fair one strictly to himself. Consequently there was

soon not a girl or a woman in the town upon whom Graesler's suspicions had not lighted; and the more spotless a lady's reputation, the stronger his suspicions.

This adventure was responsible for Böhlinger's determination to shun marriage or an intimate relationship with any woman of his own town. So the highly esteemed lawyer in a city greatly prizing respectability had to gather the rest of his experiences away from the city. He made frequent short trips which served only to confirm him in his bitter attitude toward the sex.

It would have been unwise, therefore, on Graesler's part to draw Sabine's name into the conversation. Very unwise, especially as he may have, by releasing the sweet, pure creature who had thrown herself into his arms, lost her forever. He said little more about his plans, turning the matter off by saying he had decided to await further reports from the architect. He then invited Böhlinger less cordially than he had meant to, to look him up shortly at his house on the Burggraben. Mention of his house recalled to him that he owed Böhlinger thanks for his supervision of the renovating.

"Oh, never mind about thanks," said Böhlinger modestly, "but I'll be glad to see the place again. It's filled with memories for me too, you know, of a past alas! rather remote."

As the two shook hands good-by the friends looked one another in the face. Böhlinger's eyes showed a tendency to turn moist, but Graesler could detect in himself no trace of the feeling he had been vainly expecting throughout the day. It might have taken the bad taste away from this hour and raised it to a higher level.

On the street Graesler's sense of inner emptiness amounted almost to torture. The weather had cleared, and it was not so cold. He walked down the main thoroughfare, and was glad—mildly glad—to see from the shop windows that even his home town was beginning to show clear signs of the influence of modern taste. He went into a haberdasher's to buy a hat and a few other trifles.

Instead of the stiff sort of hat that he was accustomed to wear, he chose a sombrero. The mirror assured him it was more becoming; and out on the street in the growing dusk, he felt certain he was not fooling himself when he thought that the women threw him friendly glances. It occurred to him that a letter from Sabine might have come, and he hurried home. There were quite a number of letters forwarded from the health resort—nothing from Sabine. He overcame his disappointment by telling himself he had expected the impossible.

He went out again, and resumed his aimless stroll. After a time he decided to board a tram. He remained on the back platform of the car, and noticed, for the first time with a touch of melancholy, that where there had been meadows and ploughlands in the days of his boyhood, there were now the houses of a suburb. After most of the passengers had left the car, it struck him that no conductor had come to collect his fare. Looking round for the man he encountered two

eyes scanning him quizzically. They belonged to a young, rather pale-faced girl who had been standing beside him on the platform. She was dressed in a light dress, simple but tasteful.

"You are puzzled because the conductor does not come?" she said, glancing up with a gay smile from beneath the brim of her soft straw hat.

"Precisely," he rejoined, a trifle stiffly.

"There isn't any conductor," the girl explained.

"In front, at the driver's end, you'll find a box. You drop your money in there."

"Thanks," said the doctor, and did as he was told. "I'm very much obliged to you," he repeated when he returned to the platform. "A very practical arrangement, especially for rascals."

"Rascals wouldn't have a chance here. We are all honest people."

"I am sure you are. What will the passengers have taken me for?"

"For what you are, a foreigner. You are, aren't you?" She looked at him inquisitively.

"You might call me that." Graesler gazed into space, then faced round to his companion and asked: "What sort of a foreigner do you take me for?"

"Now, of course, hearing you speak I can tell you are a German, perhaps even a German from near here. But first I thought you were from far away, from Spain or Portugal."

"Portugal?" Graesler involuntarily put his hand to his hat. "No, I am not a Portuguese. But I have been in Portugal."

"I should have thought so. You must have travelled a lot?"

"A bit." Graesler's eyes lighted up a little with the recollection of the strange lands and seas he had seen. It pleased him that the girl's expression now showed, beside curiosity, a certain admiration.

"I get off here." The announcement came unexpectedly. "I hope you have a pleasant stay in our town."

"Thanks, many thanks," said Graesler, raising his hat.

The girl left and nodded good-by from the sidewalk—more familiarly than was to be expected from so brief an acquaintance. On a bold impulse, Graesler jumped off the car, which had already started, and went up to the girl, who stood still in surprise.

"You were good enough to wish me a pleasant stay here. Our acquaintanceship has begun so promisingly, and perhaps. . ."

"Promisingly!" interrupted the girl. "What do you mean?"

That sounded like a genuine rebuff, and Graesler continued more modestly:

"I mean, your conversation is so charming, and it would really be a pity. . ."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I am almost at home, and my people expect me to supper."

"Just a quarter of an hour."

"I really can't manage it. Good-night." She turned to go.

"One moment, please," exclaimed Graesler almost with fear in his tone.

The girl waited and smiled. "We don't want our acquaintanceship to end so abruptly."

She looked up at him smiling from under the brim of her dark straw hat.

"Of course not," she said. "That would be impossible. We know one another now. If I should meet you anywhere, I should recognize you at once as—the gentleman from Portugal!"

"But I don't want to wait for a chance meeting. What if we were to arrange for another talk like this—about an hour together?"

"An hour? You must have a lot of time to spare."

"As much time as you please."

"Unfortunately the same isn't true of me."

"Nor of me always," said Graesler.

"Are you on a holiday?"

"In a way. You see, I'm a doctor. Allow me to introduce myself. Dr. Emil Graesler—born here and living here," he added, quickly as if excusing himself.

The girl smiled.

"Here" she said, "My, how you can sham! A person had better be careful of you!" She shook her head looking up at him.

"But when can I see you again?" urged Graesler.

She thought a moment.

"If it really won't bore you, you can see me home again to-morrow."

"Delighted. Where shall I meet you?"

"The best would be for you to walk up and down opposite the place where I am employed, Kleimann's glove shop, 24 Wilhelmstrasse. We close at seven. Then, if you like, you can ride back on the tram with me." She smiled.

"Is that really all the time you have to spare?"

"How can I help it? I must be home by eight o'clock."

"Do you live with your parents?"

She glanced up at him again.

"I see I must tell you who I am. My name is Katharina Rebner, my father is a postal employee, we live over there in the second story, where you see the open window. There are three of us, father, mother and myself. I have a sister, but she is married, and she and her husband are spending the evening with us; they come every Thursday. That's why I must go right home."

"This evening, but surely not every evening," Graesler put in quickly.

"What do you mean?"

Surely you don't spend all your evenings at home? You must visit your girl friends sometimes, or go to the theatre?"

"Girls like me don't often have the chance."

Katharina nodded to a man passing on the other side of the street. From his dress he seemed to be a workman of the better sort. He was not young and was carrying a parcel. Without seeming to notice Graesler he nodded in return.

"My brother-in-law. My sister must already be there. I really must go."

"I hope my having come with you won't make trouble for you at home."

"Trouble? I'm grown up, I'm happy to say, and my people know me by this time. Well, good-by."

"To-morrow, then?"

"All right."

"Seven o'clock in the Wilhelmstrasse."

Katharina did not move away. She seemed to be turning something over in her mind.

"Yes, at seven. But—" she hesitated, "you spoke of the theatre. You won't be cross with me. . . ."

"Why should I be cross with you?"

"I mean for reminding you of what you said. If you were to bring tickets for the theatre along, it would be so nice. I haven't been for such a long time."

"I'd be only too glad to. It'll make me happy to do that little favor for you."

"But don't get expensive seats, the sort you're probably used to. I shouldn't have any fun sitting in expensive seats."

"Don't you worry, Fräulein—Fräulein Katharina."

"Then you're sure you're not angry with me?"

"But Fräulein Katharina, angry—!"

She held out her hand.

"I really must hurry now. To-morrow I shan't have to get home so early."

She turned and left so quickly that Graesler missed the expression of her face, but there was a hint of promise in her voice.

As soon as he was back in his rooms the thought of Sabine returned and awakened a keen yearning. He had an irresistible impulse to write her, if only a few lines. So he sat down and told of his safe arrival, that he had found his flat in perfect order, had had a long but not conclusive talk with his old friend Böhlinger, and intended to make good use of his time the next day by visiting the hospital, where a former fellow-student was in charge of a ward. He signed himself "your sincere friend, Emil." He hurried out once again to take the letter to the station himself so that it would catch the night train.

CHAPTER NINE

NEXT morning Graesler carried out the plan he had written Sabine, and visited the hospital. The physician-in-chief gave him a cordial welcome and permitted him to accompany the members of the staff on their rounds. His interest was gratifying to himself at least. In regard to some of the more notable cases he asked for fuller information as to the course of the trouble, and the treatment, and did not even hesitate to express dissent once or twice, though always with the deprecating reservation: "As far as a health-resort physician like myself is competent to form an opinion, and to keep in touch with the advance of medical science."

At luncheon he joined some of the assistant physicians in a modest restaurant opposite the hospital and enjoyed himself so much talking shop with his young colleagues that he determined to come often. On the way home he bought the tickets for the theatre. Back in his rooms again he turned over the pages of his medical books and newspapers. But as the hours passed, his attention wandered more and more, distracted partly by the expectation of news from Sabine, partly by vague imaginings of how the evening would go. To prepare for all eventualities he decided to arrange for cold cuts and a couple of bottles of wine in the flat—this would not commit him to anything. He made the necessary purchases, ordered them to be sent home, and a few minutes before seven was pacing up and down the Wilhelmstrasse—not with the romantic hat of the previous evening. For one thing, he did not wish to be conspicuous; for another he thought it would be a test of the genuineness of Katharina's feelings if he wore his usual bard black Derby.

He was looking into a shop window when Katharina's voice sounded behind him:

"Good-evening, Dr. Graesler."

He turned round, shook hands with her, and was delighted with the charming, well-dressed girl who might have been taken to be a well-bred young lady of the middle class—which, as a matter of fact, she was, Graesler hastened to remind himself, her father being a civil servant.

"I say," she said promptly, "what do you think my brother-in-law took you for?"

"I have no idea. A Portuguese—he too?"

"Oh, no. He thought you were a musician, a band-master. He said you looked exactly like a band-master he once knew."

"Well, did you tell him I was something better or worse?"

"I told him what you really are. Wasn't that all right?"

"I certainly have no reason to make a secret of my profession. Did you tell your people that you were going to the theatre with me this evening?"

"It's no business of theirs. Besides, they never question me, and

anyhow I might have been going to the theatre alone if I liked, mightn't I?"

"Of course. But—I like this way better."

She looked at him, putting one hand up to the brim of her hat, which was a trick of hers.

"Going alone's no fun. Theater's nice only in company. Some one must sit beside you who laughs, and you can look at, and . . ."

"And what? Go on."

"And whose arm you can press when it's particularly delightful."

"I hope , you find it particularly delightful tonight. At all events I shall be at your disposal."

She laughed lightly and quickened her pace, as if afraid they'd come late.

"We're too early," said Graesler, when they reached the theatre. "It won't begin for another quarter of an hour."

She didn't listen to him. With sparkling eyes she led the way to the upper circle, hardly noticing when he helped her off with her coat. Not until they were seated side by side in the third row did she give him a look of thanks.

Graesler glanced about the moderate-sized audience to see if there was anyone he knew. Here and there he noticed a face he succeeded in remembering. But certainly in the dim light of the upper circle no one would be at all likely to recognize him.

The curtain rose. The play was a modern farce. Katharina found it most amusing. She often laughed out loud, but without turning round to Graesler. In the first interval, he bought her a box of sweets, which she accepted with a smile. During the second act, she nodded to him from time to time at parts that struck her as particularly amusing. Graesler was not attending much to the play and at one point became conscious of an opera glass levelled at him from one of the boxes. He recognized Böhlinger, and nodded to him frankly, completely ignoring his friend's bantering expression.

During the last interval he strolled up and down the foyer with Katharina. Suddenly he linked his arm in hers—she made no demur—and gave his opinion of the acting in a soft, insistent way as if there were a delicious secret between him and his charming companion. He was rather disappointed not to meet Böhlinger here.

The bell rang for the final act. When the two were back in their seats Graesler moved close to Katharina. Their arms touched, and as she did not draw away, he felt that a more intimate relationship between them was gradually being established; and when he helped her on with her jacket after the play, he ventured a fleeting pat of her hair and cheeks.

Outside, she looked up at him from beneath the brim of her hat and said in a tone that had a ring of pretence in it:

"Now I must be getting home."

"But first," he neatly interposed, "you will do me the honor to

take supper with me, won't you?"

She looked at him dubiously an instant, then gave a quick, earnest nod of assent, as if understanding more than the obvious meaning of his words. Like lovers whose footsteps are hastened by passion, they hurried, arm-in-arm, through the dark streets to his house.

When Graesler switched on the light in his study, Katharina looked round at the pictures and books with curious interest.

"Do you like the place?"

She nodded.

"It's a very old house, isn't it?"

"Three hundred years, at least."

"But how new everything looks!"

He offered to show her round the other rooms. She liked the furniture and the way it was arranged, but looked at him with suspicious astonishment when she entered his sister's room.

"Don't tell me you are married and—your wife is away?"

He smiled, then, passing his hand across his forehead, explained in a low voice about how the room had been furnished and redecorated for his sister, who had died in the south a few months earlier. Katharina looked at him searchingly. She seemed satisfied and drew nearer, and took his hand and stroked it caressingly. It made him feel good.

They went into the dining-room, where Katharina was prevailed upon at last to take off her hat and coat. In a trice she was at home. Graesler started to lay the table. She would not allow him to. He yielded to her playful insistence and from a seat at the other end of the room watched, with some emotion, the housewifely way in which she prepared everything and moved about in the kitchen and dining-room as if she had been keeping house there a long time.

She served the food, he poured the wine. It was a little feast. She talked with delight of the way the evening had gone, and was amazed to learn from Graesler that he rarely went to the theatre, which to her represented the acme of earthly joys. He explained how his occupation gave him few opportunities for such amusements: he had to change his residence every half year, had just come from a little German health resort, and would soon be starting for a distant island where there was no winter, where tall palm trees grew, and where people drove in quaint little carriages through a yellow country beneath the burning sun.

"Are there many snakes there?"

"One can protect oneself against them."

"When are you going back?"

"Very soon. Would you like to come along?" He spoke in jest, but felt, in spite of the mood brought on by several glasses of wine drunk in quick succession, that a hint of truth quivered in his joke.

She answered simply, without looking at him:

"Why not?"

He drew closer to her, and put his arm gently round her neck. She recoiled. It did not displease him. He rose, determined from now on to treat Katharina quite like a lady, and he politely asked her leave to smoke a cigar. Then, as he smoked, and walked up and down the room, he spoke seriously and impressively of the strange course of man's days, not one of which can be counted on in advance. He spoke of the numerous places in the north and in the south to which his work had led him. Sometimes he stood beside Katharina, who went on eating dates and nuts, and gently laid his hand on her brown hair.

Katharina listened interestedly, occasionally interrupting with eager questions. At times her eyes lighted up with a peculiar, mocking expression which made Graesler go on talking with even more circumstantiality.

When the clock struck midnight, Katharina jumped up as if it were the absolute signal for going. Graesler pretended to be quite upset though in the bottom of his soul he felt a certain relief. Before Katharina left, she cleared the table, pushed the chairs into their places, and tidied the room. At the door, she suddenly raised herself on tiptoe, and held up her lips to be kissed.

"Because you have been so well-behaved," she added. Again there was that peculiar gleam of mockery in her eyes.

They went down the stairs by the light of a flickering candle, which Graesler carried. At the first corner was a cab. They got in. Katharina nestled up against Graesler, he put his arm round her neck, and they drove silently through the deserted streets, until, when they were near Katharina's home, Graesler drew the girl toward him more hotly and covered her mouth and cheeks with passionate kisses. At Katharina's request, the cab drew up at a little distance from her door.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

She promised to come next evening. She got out, and asking him not to accompany her to the door, vanished in the shadow of the houses.

Next morning, Dr. Graesler felt not the least inclination to visit the hospital. Later, when he was walking in the park in the cool, clear autumn sunshine, at an hour when other people were all at work, he had some stirrings of conscience, as if he were responsible to someone beside himself. That someone, he knew, was Sabine. The thought of Dr. Frank's sanatorium suddenly urged itself upon him. He began to turn over in his mind various alterations: considered the possibility of installing new bath-rooms, drafted prospectuses in far more convincing language than he had ever had at his command, and vowed that he would return to the health resort and settle the matter the instant he heard from Sabine.

If she did not answer his last letter either, then all would be at an end, at least between him and her. As for the sanatorium there was, of course, no reason why the purchase of it should be made contingent upon her attitude. In fact, it wasn't a bad idea, on the contrary a

devilishly good idea to enter the place, all splendidly renovated, with another lady manager—if possible with one who did not consider him a bore of an egoist and prig. And, if it should please him to choose Katharina as his companion, then, certainly, no one could say he was a bourgeois and prig.

He sat down on a bench. Children at play ran about. The mellow sunlight glinted through the russet foliage. A siren in a distant factory was blowing for noon.

“This evening, this evening!” he thought. “Is it youth cropping up in me again? Am I not too old for such an adventure? Oughtn’t I be on my guard? Shall I go away? Right away—the next ship to Lanza-rote? Or—back to Sabine? To the creature with the pure soul? Hm! Who knows what turn her life might have taken had she met the right man at the right moment—not necessarily a saucy tenor, or a hangdog doctor man.”

He betook himself for luncheon to the best hotel, where he would not be teased by the shop talk of the young physicians. After luncheon would be time enough to make up his mind.

CHAPTER TEN

IN the afternoon he had just seated himself at his desk and opened a book on anatomy when someone knocked at the door. It was the compositor’s wife, the woman who kept house for him. With profuse apologies, she asked whether Dr. Graesler would spare her one or two pieces from his sister’s wardrobe. Graesler frowned.

“She would never have had the cheek,” he thought, “to ask such a thing if I had not had a lady visitor last night!”

He answered evasively that his sister had willed that all such things should be given to deserving charities. Anyhow, he had not yet had time to look into the matter, and couldn’t promise anything for the moment.

The woman had come prepared with the key of the attic, and handed it to Graesler with an officious smile, thanking him as effusively as if her request had been granted.

After she was gone, leaving him with the key in his hand, it occurred to Graesler it was good for him to have found a way to pass the next hours, and he went up to visit the attic, which he had not entered since boyhood. The tiny window in the roof admitted so little light that it was some time before his eyes got used to the obscurity. Old forgotten useless odds and ends cumbered the dark comers; in the middle of the room stood boxes and trunks.

In the first case that Graesler opened were old curtains and house linen. It not being his intention to unpack and arrange all these things, he shut the lid and turned to a long coffin-like chest. Its contents

seemed more interesting. There was a litter of manuscripts—legal documents, letters in their envelopes, and packets of various sizes tied up with string. On one of these he read: “Some of father’s papers.” It was a surprise to Graesler that his sister had kept things like this so carefully.

Another packet that he handled was sealed three times and was marked in large letters: “To be burned unread.”

Graesler shook his head mournfully.

“My poor dear Friederike, your wish shall be fulfilled at the first convenient opportunity.”

He replaced the packet, which he thought probably contained her diary as a girl and innocent love letters, and opened a third box, filled with kerchiefs, shawls, ribbons, and lace yellow with age. Graesler recognized some pieces as having belonged to his mother and even his grandmother. Many had been worn by his sister, especially in earlier days. There was the beautiful Indian shawl embroidered with foliage and flowers that a wealthy patient had given him for his sister as a parting gift a good many years before. Friederike had worn it recently. It was quite unsuitable either for the compositor’s wife or for a charitable institution. So were a good many of the other things. But they would do charmingly for a pretty young woman who was good enough to cheer a lonely old bachelor. He closed the chest with particular care, folded the shawl smooth, and carried it off on his arm from the attic.

He had not long to wait before Katharina arrived. She had come straight from the shop a few minutes ahead of the appointed time.

“Without even waiting to tidy myself up,” she remarked apologetically and merrily.

Graesler was glad she had come. He kissed her hand and with a humorous courtesy, handed her the shawl, which was lying ready on the table.

“What on earth is that?” she asked, with an air of surprise.

“Something to make a person look pretty,” he answered, “even if she doesn’t need anything to make her pretty.”

“How splendid!” she cried.

She shook the shawl out and studied the effect in the mirror, speechless with delight. Then she turned to Graesler, looked up at him, took his head in both her hands, drew his face down, and kissed him on the lips.

“A thousand thanks,” she said.

“That’s not enough.”

“A million, then.”

He shook his head. She smiled.

“I thank you,” she said, and put up her lips for another kiss.

He took her in his arms.

“I went up to the attic this afternoon,” he told her, “to pick the shawl out for you. There must be plenty of other things up there that

will be just as becoming to you."

She shook her head as if deprecating the idea of another costly gift.

"Did you enjoy yourself last night? And did you have to work hard to-day?" Graesler asked her.

She answered him, and he in turn told her what he had done since they saw each other as if they had been old friends.

"Instead of going to the hospital I lounged about in the park, thinking of long ago when I used to play under the grass-grown walls."

He told of other memories, dwelling in especial—half by design and half by chance—upon the days when he had been ship's surgeon. Katharina plied him with a child's curious questions about the appearance, dress, and customs of the strange people, about coral reefs and cyclones. Subconsciously he felt that he had to elaborate things which he had narrated with good effect in higher circles, for a simpler and therefore more appreciative audience. Involuntarily he assumed the tone of an uncle who delights children in the dark with stories of adventure.

Katharina sat beside him on the sofa, her hand in his. After a while she rose to get supper, but just then the front-door bell rang. Graesler was startled. What could it be? His thoughts raced. A telegram? From the ranger's lodge? Sabine? Was her father ill? or her mother? Or was it something to do with the sanatorium? Perhaps an urgent enquiry from Dr. Frank? There might be another purchaser in the field. It might even be Sabine herself at the door. Then what the devil should he do? Anyhow she couldn't take him for an old fogey any more. But young girls with pure souls don't ring at bachelors' doors so late in the evening.

The bell rang again, shriller than the first time. Graesler noticed Katharina's eyes upon him, questioning but undisturbed. Too undisturbed, it struck him. Perhaps she knew something about the visitor. Was it her father? Or her brother-in-law—her alleged brother-in-law? A put-up job? Blackmail?

It served him right. How could he have let himself in for such an affair! Old fool that he was! Well, they wouldn't get much out of him. He wouldn't let himself be intimidated. It was not the first time he had been in danger—not the first time by a long way! A bullet had whistled past his ear in the affray in the South Seas. The mate—that handsome, fair-haired fellow—had been shot dead close beside him.

"Hadn't you better see who's there?" asked Katharina, showing surprise at his strange expression.

"Of course," he answered.

"Who can it be, so late?" he heard her say—the hypocrite—as he left the room.

Closing the door behind him, he looked through the judas into the hallway. A woman stood there, bare-headed, with a candle in her hand.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Excuse me, is the doctor at home?"

"What do you want? Who are you?"

"Beg pardon, I am Frau Sommer's maid."

"Who is Frau Sommer? I don't know her."

"The lady who lives in the first story. Her little girl is very ill. Please, can I speak to the doctor?"

Graesler drew a breath of relief, and opened the door.

He remembered that a widow by the name of Sommer lived in the house. Her daughter was about seven years old. The mother must have been the pretty woman in mourning whom he had met on the stair yesterday. He had turned to look at her, almost without thinking.

"I am Dr. Graesler. What do you want?"

"If you'd come to look at the little girl, sir.

Her head is so hot, and she cries and cries."

"I don't practise here; I am only on a visit. I would rather you sent for another doctor."

"It's not easy to get anyone as late as this."

A door opened on the landing below, and a light shone up the stairway.

"Anna," some one called in a loud whisper.

"That's Frau Sommer," said the servant.

She ran to the banister.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"Why are you so long? Is the doctor out?"

Graesler also stepped to the rail and looked down. The lady, whose features were indistinct in the half light, raised her hands as if to a saviour.

"Thank God! You'll come directly, won't you, doctor? My little girl—I don't know what is the matter with her."

"I'll—I'll come. Of course I will. But just one moment. I must fetch my thermometer. One moment, please."

"Thank you," came the whisper, as Dr. Graesler closed the front door behind him.

Katharina was leaning against the table awaiting him eagerly. He felt profoundly tender towards her, all the more because of his suspicions. She seemed to him like an angel.

"Rotten luck," he said, stroking her hair. "They want me to come and see a sick child in this very house. I can't possibly refuse. There seems nothing left but to put you in a cab. . . ."

She gripped his hand, which was still resting on her head.

"You are going to send me away?"

"Most unwillingly, as you can imagine. Or—or—would you really be patient enough to wait for me?"

She caressed his hand.

"If you won't be too long?"

"I shall be as quick as possible. How sweet you are."

He kissed her forehead, hastened to fetch the pocket case which was lying ready in the study, and asked her to go on with her supper. From the doorway he looked back. She gave him a friendly nod, and as he hurried down the stairs he was cheered by the thought that a dear girl was waiting to give him a loving greeting when he came back from the gloomy seriousness of a professional visit.

Frau Sommer was sitting beside the bed of her little girl. The child was tossing feverishly. After an examination, Graesler told the mother that a rash might be expected to break out shortly. She was in despair. She had lost her other child three years before, and her husband had died six months before while abroad on a business journey. She had never even seen his grave. What was she to do if the last that was left her was to be taken from her too?

"No need to be so alarmed," said Graesler. "It may be nothing more than a simple case of tonsillitis. But even if it is the beginning of something more serious, your child is so healthy-looking and well-nourished, I am sure it will be able to resist."

The mother, Graesler was glad to see, was relieved by his sensible words. The maid was sent to the chemist's to have the prescription filled, and Graesler sat by the sick bed, feeling the child's pulse, or laying his hand on her dry, hot forehead, where it sometimes encountered the hand of the anxious mother.

After a long silence, she began again to put anxious questions. The doctor took her hand paternally, spoke kindly to her—thinking that Sabine would certainly be pleased with him now. At the same time, he did not fail to notice, in the subdued greenish light of the shaded lamp, that the young widow's wrapper draped a graceful figure. As soon as the maid returned, he rose, and reiterated what he had casually explained when he came, that he could not go on with the case, as he had to leave town in a few days. Frau Sommer begged him to keep on as long as he stayed; she had no confidence in the local practitioners, while he had inspired her with the most absolute trust; she felt certain that if anyone could save her darling child, Dr. Graesler was the man. So he had to promise to come again in the morning. He watched quietly at the bedside a few moments longer, and when the child began to breathe more evenly, he pressed the mother's hand cordially and took leave.

On entering his dining-room he was surprised to find it empty.

"Lost patience," he thought. "It was only to be expected. Just as well, perhaps; the child downstairs is probably going to have some infectious trouble. Very likely the young woman thought as much. Sabine would not have run away. I see she's had her supper before going."

He contemplated the table with the remains of the meal on it. His lip curled contemptuously.

"It would not be a bad idea," he went on thinking, "to go downstairs again and keep the pretty widow company."

He felt that beside the sick child's cot the mother would grant him anything he asked—and the depravity of the notion gave him a far from unpleasant thrill.

"But I shan't go down," he said to himself, "for I am and always will be an old fogey after all. This time Sabine would probably forgive me for it."

The door into the study was open. He turned on the light. Of course, Katharina was not there either. Switching off, he noticed a gleam of light through the crack of the door that led into his bedroom. A faint hope stirred within him. He dallied a while; it did him good to savour the warmth of expectation. A rustling sound came from within. He opened the door. There was Katharina, lying or rather sitting up in his bed, reading.

"You won't be angry with me?" she said simply, looking up from the big volume that she was holding in both hands. Her brown, softly-curling hair was loose and fell over her white shoulders.

How pretty she was. Graesler continued to stand in the doorway without stirring. He smiled, for the book lying on the counterpane was the work on anatomy.

"What's that you've got hold of?" he asked, drawing nearer almost bashfully.

"It was lying on your writing-table, dear. Oughtn't I to have taken it? Forgive me. But if I hadn't, I'd have gone to sleep, and then nothing would have waked me up."

Her eyes smiled, not mockingly, but almost with an air of surrender. Graesler sat on the edge of the bed, drew her to him and kissed her throat. The heavy book went shut with a bang.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHEN Dr. Graesler went to visit his little patient next morning, Katharina left, and reappeared early in the evening. To Graesler's surprise, she brought a suit-case along. The night before she had said to him: "I haven't taken my holiday yet. It's as if I had known of this beforehand and saved up the holiday." In the intoxication of the first embrace Graesler had promptly invited her on a little honeymoon trip. But now, when she arrived all equipped for leaving, and hailed him merrily: "Here I am. If you like we can go straight to the station," something in him revolted against this offhand way of taking charge of his life, and he was glad to be able to plead that the little girl turned out to have scarlet fever, and he could not go away.

Katharina did not seem greatly perturbed. She prattled of other things, made him admire her new brown shoes, and told him how the head of the firm had just returned with novelties from London and Paris. As she talked, she went about the room, replacing one or two books in the shelves, and tidying the writing-table, while Graesler

stood at the window and contemplated her doings silently and not unmoved. His glance fell on the suit-case; it looked melancholy and almost ashamed as it stood on the floor. The thought that the good creature would have to take it away with her soon touched him with light compassion. He held back from saying anything of the sort, but later, when he had sat down in the chair at his desk and Katharina was sitting on his knee like a child, her arm around his neck, he said:

“Need it be a journey? Why not just spend your holiday here with me?”

“That would be impossible, wouldn’t it?” she answered weakly.

“Why? Isn’t it lovely here?” He pointed through the window towards the range of distant hills, and added jokingly: “You’ll like your board and lodging, too.”

With sudden decision, he rose, offered Katharina his arm, and escorted her into Friederike’s room. He switched on the red-shaded hanging lamp. The room was suffused with a soft light. “Consider this your own, beloved,” he said with grave courtesy.

Katharina was struck dumb; she could merely shake her head earnestly.

“Wouldn’t you like it?” Graesler asked tenderly.

“It’s really impossible,” she answered softly.

“Why? It is quite possible.” As if her only objection could be a superstitious one, he went on: “Everything is new, even the wallpaper. It didn’t use to look half so nice.”

Katharina looked round the room, her face cleared, and she stroked the flowered chintz of the sofa at the foot of the bed. Then her eyes fell on the muslin curtains over the toilet-table, looped back to disclose a pretty toilet set and a number of cut-glass phials. Graesler left her to her absorption and returned presently with her little suit-case. She quivered, and smiled half incredulously. He nodded to her, she shook her head. Then, as if finally persuaded, she stretched her arms out to him. He put down the case, and with gratified pride clasped her to his breast.

Some wonderful days followed, such as Graesler had scarcely enjoyed even in his youth. Like a happy newly-married couple, they spent most of the day in their own quarters, assiduously waited upon by the compositor’s wife, who accepted the rather unusual situation with all the more readiness because Graesler had gratified her cool request and had given her quite a number of articles from his dead sister’s wardrobe.

In the evenings the young couple would walk arm-in-arm through the quieter streets. One sunny afternoon they made an early start, and drove into the country in an open carriage, quite undisturbed by the possibility that they might meet some of Katharina’s relatives (who supposed the girl to be staying with a friend at a considerable distance).

One day when they were still at table, Böhlinger called. Graesler

was dubious about admitting him. Afterwards he was glad that he had let him in. The lawyer treated his friend's charming companion most politely. He quickly explained the business that had brought him, and took leave with the easy grace of a man of the world, kissing Katharina's hand on parting. The incident enhanced Graesler's tender feeling for Katharina, who had played her part with social perfection.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DR. GRAESLER visited his little patient every morning, then went for half-an-hour's walk to minimize the risk of conveying infection to Katharina. The scarlet fever ran a mild course. When the alarm of the first days had subsided, Frau Sommer proved to be a very gay, sociable, talkative person, who, whether by chance or design, never seemed to notice whether the wrapper she received the doctor in was as carefully closed across the neck and bosom as was quite proper. She always enquired after Graesler's "young lady friend," and asked whether he proposed to take his sweetheart back to Africa—this being the name she had hit upon for the region where the doctor practised in winter—or whether he had a charmer (a negress perhaps) already awaiting him there. She even wanted him to take a box of chocolates to Katharina as a little gift from herself, but he refused to from fear of infection.

Katharina, on her side, had a word or two to say about the young widow. Though jealousy was at the bottom of her irony, Graesler could not but feel that there was justice in what she said. It appeared that during her husband's lifetime Frau Sommer's reputation had not been wholly above suspicion. His work as commercial traveller entailed frequent and prolonged absences; her little girl had been born before the marriage, and it was not certain whether he was the father. All this gossip came to Katharina from the compositor's wife, with whom, during her lover's occasional absences, she talked more freely than Graesler found altogether agreeable.

Once, he tried to make her realize how unsuitable this intimacy was. She hardly seemed to understand his considerations, and he did not insist because he was loath to darken the few days of his happiness by discord. He was fully determined that the days should be only a few and merely an interlude, an adventure. Whenever she asked him, modestly but curiously, about his plans for the winter, what sort of climate Lanzarote had, and what sort of life there was there, he would answer as briefly as possible and turn the conversation to something else, not wishing to raise hopes he had no intention to fulfil. It was his one desire that these brief weeks should pass without a cloud, and so he asked her little about her past, content to live in the present, delighting in his happiness, and delighting still more in the happiness he

was able to bestow.

Gradually, however, as the days and nights slipped by, a longing for Sabine began to stir within him, especially in the early morning when Katharina was still asleep by his side. How much happier he would be, what a much worthier existence he would be leading, if, instead of this pretty shop-girl (who must certainly have had two or three lovers in addition to the book-keeper to whom she had been engaged for a time, who tricked her good parents, and who gossiped with his housekeeper), if instead of this insignificant creature—whose charm and kindness he did not for a moment underestimate—he had a very different companion. What if Sabine's head were resting on the pillow beside him—she who had so delicately offered to join her life to his, and whose advances he had spurned in an unwarrantable fit of self-distrust.

He did not deceive himself. She had taken his timid and foolish letter as a definite refusal. As a matter of fact at bottom that is what he had intended it to be. But could he not retrieve his blunder? Could he not atone for his awkwardness and precipitation? Was it likely that Sabine's feelings for him, which she had expressed in such considerate words, had been extinguished never to be kindled again? In his own letter he had set a term. By not writing to him was she not merely complying with his request; and weren't her silence and her forbearance the very mark of what was noblest and truest in her?

And now if he were to return to her at the end of the set term and were to give her an absolute yes, a yes that was the result of mature consideration, would he find her a different person from the one he had left? In the peaceful retirement of the ranger's lodge, no new lover was likely to have approached her. Her pure soul would not have been perturbed either by his foolish though well-meant letter, or by the intrusion of another passion. The very thought that Sabine might have a new wooer was the expiring flicker of a mood due to loneliness and timidity in one to whom confidence and self-assurance had now been restored by a wonderful turn of fortune's wheel. More and more it seemed to him that Katharina's true mission had been to lead him back to Sabine, whose love was to be for him the real meaning of his life. And the more trustingly Katharina—with no ulterior end in view—offered him the treasures of her gay, young heart, the more impatiently and hopefully his deepest yearnings went out to Sabine.

External factors also began to impose a prompt decision as October drew to a close. Graesler thought it expedient to write to Dr. Frank saying he hoped to call at the sanatorium in a few days and settle the affair. No answer came, and he wired to ask whether he could count on meeting him on a specified day. Even the telegram did not elicit a reply. This annoyed but did not alarm Graesler; he remembered what an old curmudgeon Frank was. As for writing to Sabine and telling her he was coming, that, he knew from his previous experience, was something he couldn't possibly do. He would simply

go unannounced, stand before her, and take her hands in his. Her clear eyes would give him the redeeming answer.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE day Katharina's holiday ended and she was to return to her parents' home had naturally been fixed at the outset of her stay. As if by mutual agreement, however, they both avoided mention of it, and Katharina's whole manner betrayed so little thought of a separation that Graesler began to feel uneasy lest this clinging little creature, who had turned up uninvited one evening with her suit-case, contemplated spending the rest of her life with him. He considered the possibility of taking flight from the house and the town early one morning before she was awake, and began to make inconspicuous preparations for departure. Besides the Indian shawl, he had given her a number of his sister's belongings, including a few trinkets. The more valuable pieces of jewelry he reserved for Sabine. He felt he must find one more memento for Katharina to salve his conscience and to comfort her a bit for his disappearing. So two days before his intended departure, on a rainy afternoon while Katharina, as she often did at that hour, was resting in her room, Graesler mounted to the attic again. Rummaging in the trunks and boxes, turning over silks, portfolios of pictures, veils, handkerchiefs, ribbons, and lace, he unexpectedly came across the packet which bore Friederike's inscription directing that its contents should be burned unread.

For the first time, as if suspecting that it might be long before he revisited this room, or even that he might never see it again, he felt the spur of curiosity. He laid the packet aside with the thought that he had better find a safer place for its disposal, and that a later heir, who would have no scruples regarding the wishes of an unknown person long deceased, would probably open it without hesitation.

For Katharina he chose a few pretty trifles, among them a fine amber necklace and a piece of gold-embroidered oriental stuff—articles which, like many others in the trunks he had never imagined Friederike possessed. He took them along with the packet, and laid them on his writing-table before going to Katharina's room.

He found Katharina leaning back in the armchair, wrapped in a gift of his, a Chinese dressinggown richly worked with gold dragons on a purple ground. She had fallen asleep over one of the serial numbers of an illustrated novel, her favorite literature. Touched at the sight and reluctant to wake her, Graesler returned to the study, sat down at the writing-table, and began to play heedlessly with the threads which tied up the packet, until the seals cracked and broke. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not?" he said to himself. "She is dead. I have no belief in personal immortality. But if after all there should be immortality

Friederike's soul on high will not take what I do amiss. Besides, there are not likely to be any dreadful secrets in the letters."

The letters were carefully arranged with blank sheets between. The first that Graesler read dated more than thirty years back and was from a young man who signed himself Robert and evidently had the right to address Friederike in extremely affectionate terms. The letter showed that Robert had been a family friend. Graesler, however, couldn't remember him. There were about a dozen letters from him; love letters, but very innocent and of no great interest to Graesler.

Next came letters belonging to the period when Graesler was ship's surgeon and paid only brief visits to his home at two years' intervals. The letters were now in various handwritings, and it was some time before Graesler could make out what could be the meaning of all these passionate asseverations, oaths of fidelity, allusions to happy hours, ebullitions of jealousy, warnings, vague threats, and fierce vituperations. He could not imagine what this amazing hotchpotch could have to do with his sister. He was on the point of deciding that the letters must have been addressed to some other person (perhaps to one of Friederike's women friends, who had entrusted them to Friederike for safe keeping) when he recognized a familiar handwriting, and from this and from other signs he knew that these particular letters were from Böhlinger.

The threads of the strange romance began to disentangle themselves. Graesler made out that his sister, more than twenty years earlier, when she had already been a fairly mature woman, had been secretly engaged to Böhlinger. Böhlinger, on account of one of Friederike's previous love affairs, had delayed the wedding. From impatience, caprice, or vindictiveness, Friederike then betrayed him, but later sought a reconciliation. Böhlinger merely replied with outbursts of mockery and contempt. The tone of his last letters was so immoderate, so abusive, that Graesler couldn't understand how in the end a tolerable relationship, in fact a sort of friendship could have been established between the two.

His feelings were rather of excitement than wonder. It was, therefore, with enhanced curiosity and not with any sense of shock, that he went on to find out what further secrets of Friederike's life the remaining letters would disclose.

There were not many left, and were in different handwritings; from which Graesler inferred that Friederike had now preserved only samples of her correspondence.

First came two or three written in a cipher of letters and figures. After a gap of several years followed letters from the period when Friederike kept house for her brother. Some of these were in French, some in English, and some in what Graesler supposed to be a Slavic language, though he had been quite unaware that his sister knew any such language.

Some of the letters were from wooers; others from the grateful

recipients of favors, respectfully cautious, or else the unambiguous expression of love. In both kinds Graesler could occasionally glimpse the blurred image of one or another of his patients, whom he himself, in the unwitting role of pander, must have introduced to Friederike.

There was no doubt that the last of the letters burning with passion, chaotic, and filled with forebodings of imminent death, had been written by a lad of nineteen, a consumptive in the last stages of the disease whom ten years before Graesler had sent northward from Lanzarote to die at home. Perhaps, the doctor thought, Friederike, who had then seemed to him so quiet and good, but had now been revealed as a passionate woman with a wide experience of love, might have been responsible for the poor young fellow's premature end.

The shame with which it filled Graesler that his sister had considered him unworthy of her confidence, doubtless (like Sabine) looking upon him as an old fogey, rather marred his feelings for her, especially as it struck him that to some of the writers of the letters he must have seemed as ridiculous as a deceived husband. In the end, all this was outweighed by satisfaction that Friederike had tasted of the fullness of life and he was free from responsibility towards her. For it was now plain that she had given up life because it could no longer offer her the pleasure that she had once enjoyed in abundance.

As he fluttered the pages of the letters again and reread a passage here and there, it dawned upon him that the revelation was, after all, not entirely unexpected; and on reflection it seemed less enigmatic than at first. A number of incidents recurred to his mind. He recalled a little affair on the Lake of Geneva between Friederike and a French captain. One of the letters contained an allusion to it. At the time he had not understood the full significance of the incident, and had felt that it was no business of his to interfere with the freedom of a woman well on in the thirties. As for Friederike and Böhlinger, he had been aware that the two as very young people had been greatly attached to one another, but circumstances had kept him from knowing about their later intimacy. Quite possibly the strange glances Friederike had sometimes given him in the last years had not been reproachful. On the contrary, they probably pled for forgiveness that she had lived with him as if with a stranger, and kept her feelings and experiences a secret from him. But still, he reflected, he himself had told Friederike only the most innocent of his adventures, while there had been a host of others that he had kept concealed which would have appeared just as questionable if written about in letters marked "to be burned." Consequently, he had no right to bear her a grudge for a reserve which he himself had been so careful to practise.

Katharina coming up from behind laid her hands on his forehead.

"You?" he asked, as if waking from a dream.

"I've been in twice before, but you were so absorbed I didn't want to disturb you."

He looked at his watch. Half-past nine. Four hours wrapped in

that life history.

"I have been reading some of my sister's letters," he said, drawing Katharina on to his knee. "She was a strange woman."

For an instant he thought of telling Katharina the story in the letters, but it would have been wronging the memory of Friederike to retail her experiences to this girl who would probably trace similarities that in a higher sense were non-existent.

He pushed the letters aside with a gesture as if to say, the dead past must bury its dead, and, in the tone of a man emerging from dark dreams to a bright present, he asked Katharina what she had been doing with herself.

"Oh, I went on reading my novel for some time; then I cleaned the silver and the glass on the toilet-table, then I altered some of the fastenings on the Chinese robe. And then—oh, well, I spent half an hour on the stairs talking to the housekeeper. You know she's really quite a nice woman, even though you can't bear her."

Graesler was not best pleased that Katharina should enjoy conversing with a woman in such a station and that she should show herself on the stairs in her Chinese dressing-gown. However, this episode in his life was nearly over. In a few days he would be back in a worthier and purer environment. He was never likely to see Katharina again. His future visits to his native city would be brief, for the sanatorium would demand his whole attention year in and year out.

Katharina was still sitting on his knee, and he went on mechanically stroking her cheeks and neck. Suddenly he noticed that she was looking at him attentively and with a sad expression.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She shook her head, and tried to smile. He was distressed and astonished to see that there were tears in her eyes.

"You are crying," he said gently, feeling at this moment surer of Sabine than ever before.

"Nonsense," answered Katharina, and jumped up. Making a merry face, she opened the door into the dining-room and showed him that the table was ready for supper.

"Do you mind my having supper with you in this Chinese robe?"

This reminded him of the amber necklace. He clasped it round her neck.

"Still another thing?"

"Yes, but that's the last." The moment the words were out of his mouth he was sorry. They sounded worse than he had meant them to be. "I mean . . ." he said, trying to make amend.

She raised her hand as if to tell him to keep quiet.

They sat down to supper. After a bite or two, she suddenly asked:

"Shall you think of me sometimes when you have gone?"

This was her first allusion to the impending separation. Graesler was non-plussed. Noticing his discomfiture she added hurriedly:

"Don't say anything more than yes or no."

“Yes,” he answered with a forced smile.

She nodded, and seemed perfectly satisfied, as she filled both their glasses. Now she went on prattling in her usual gay, naïve way, as if there were no parting in view—or else as if it didn’t matter to her much that they were going to part.

She wrapped the Chinese garment, which was too large for her, tightly round her body, then let it fall free, pulled it up over her head, let it down again, and danced round the room, wine-glass in one hand, the gathered-up robe embroidered with golden dragons in the other hand, laughing gaily, with languishing eyes.

Graesler took her in his arms, and half carried her into the dimly lighted room that had once been Friederike’s. His ecstasy was tinged with a sub-flavor of dull anger against the sister who had lied and deceived him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GRAESLER rose next morning while Katharina was still asleep, and went to pay a final visit to his little patient. She was getting on splendidly, but he was still keeping her in bed. He did not wish that any hint of his intention to leave so precipitately should reach Katharina’s ears by way of the housekeeper, and he thought it best to tell Frau Sommer that he expected to stay a week longer. She smiled, saying:

“I can quite understand that you don’t find it easy to tear yourself away from your young friend. She’s a charming creature, and she looks perfectly lovely in that Chinese robe you gave her.”

Graesler frowned, and turned to examine little Fanny, who was arranging her doll’s flaxen hair with all a child’s seriousness.

A few days before he had begun to tell Fanny about some wild beasts for a menagerie that had been on shipboard on one of his homeward voyages. She gave him no peace; he must tell her exactly how the lions looked, and the tigers, and the leopards, which he had sometimes watched being fed between decks. But he cut the recital short, having a number of preparations to make for his departure on the morrow. He rose suddenly, to the little girl’s great dissatisfaction, and made for the door. Frau Sommer detained him with a dozen questions regarding details of treatment—matters he had already explained time and again. Though noticing his impatience, she still kept him back, standing very close to him, as she always did, and gazing at him with an expression of sentimental gratitude. Finally he escaped and hurried out.

He had told Katharina that he had a great deal to attend to that day, and was obliged to visit the hospital, so that she should not get impatient and should leave him plenty of time to make preparations for the trip. He actually did go to the hospital and take leave of the

senior physician, then he made a few purchases, arranged for the forwarding of his baggage, and went to see Böhlinger, with whom there were various business matters to be settled. Böhlinger seemed hardly to notice his friend's uneasiness. He gave Graesler cordial wishes for success in the negotiations with Dr. Frank, and deliberately avoided all reference to private matters. It was not until after the two had parted that Graesler remembered he had been conversing with one of his dead sister's former lovers.

He now hastened home for his final luncheon with Katharina. He proposed to spend these last hours with her undisturbed, and would give no sign of his intention to leave next morning before she awoke. A letter containing a small gift of money would be sufficient farewell.

When he entered the dining-room, he found that the table had been laid for one only. The compositor's wife appeared and remarked, with a malicious assumption of regret, that by the young lady's orders she herself had laid the table, and the young lady begged to be excused. Graesler's fierce look drove her out of the room in alarm. He hurried into the study, where he found a sealed letter from Katharina.

"My dear, dear Friend,

"It was so lovely with you. I shall think of you a lot. I know you're going away to-morrow, and I'd better not disturb you to-day. I hope all will go well with you. If you come again next year—but you'll have forgotten me long before then. I hope you'll have a pleasant sea voyage. A thousand thanks for everything.

"Your loving

"Katharina."

Graesler was touched by the lovingness of the letter and the clumsy, childish handwriting.

"She's a dear," he said to himself. But he wouldn't be soft. He returned to the dining-room, rang for luncheon, and between the courses made entries in his engagement book so as to avoid exchanging a word with the housekeeper, whom he dismissed immediately after the meal.

Then he wandered over the flat. Everything was in perfect order. All Katharina's belongings had been removed. No trace was left of her beyond a subtle fragrance which lingered most in the room that had been hers the last three weeks.

To Graesler the whole place, although everything else was as usual, seemed intolerably chill and empty, and the loneliness that came over him made him wonder whether he shouldn't throw his other hopes and possibilities to the winds, and ask Katharina to come back to him. But no, he quickly told himself, that would be unwise, ridiculous, it would imperil his whole future, would destroy all chance of a happiness that seemed almost within his grasp.

All of a sudden the image of Sabine flashed up in his soul with

wonderful brightness. There was nothing now to keep him from leaving that very evening; he would see Sabine early the next morning. However, he did not act on the impulse; he mustn't appear before his lady-love jaded after a sleepless night.

He would use the extra time at his disposal to write a letter announcing his return. It would prepare the ground for a favorable reception. But when he sat down at his desk and took up his pen, he found himself unable to put down a word that could give even approximate expression to his feelings. He contented himself with a couple of lines tossed off as if in the heat of passion:

"I am coming to-morrow evening. I hope you will receive me kindly.

"Longingly, E. G."

Next he wrote out a telegram to Dr. Frank, saying he would be back early the next day, and asking him to send a message to his rooms stating whether it would be possible to begin the renovations on November 15th.

He himself dispatched the letter and telegram, returned home, arranged various belongings, and packed his valise, into which he put a small antique cameo with the head of a goddess set in gold. During the night he awoke with a start half a dozen times at least from nightmares in which it seemed to him that all would be lost, Sabine, and Katharina, and the sanatorium, and his property, and his youth, and the lovely southern sunshine, and the ivory cameo—were he to oversleep himself in the morning and miss the train.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

IT was a mild, sunny afternoon in the late autumn when Dr. Graesler returned to the health resort. In front of the railway station were about half a dozen hotel omnibuses and two or three cabs. The hotel runners called out the names of their respective hotels half-heartedly, as few health-seekers visited the place at that advanced season.

Dr. Graesler drove home and told the driver to wait. He asked for his letters, was annoyed to find that there was no answer from Dr. Frank, and bitterly disappointed that there was no word of greeting from Sabine. He pumped his obliging housekeeper. No news of importance in the town, or neighborhood, or—the ranger's lodge!

At last, not until nightfall, he drove along the familiar road past the village, now for the most part untenanted; up the valley between the gloomy hills and beneath a starless sky; onward to the place where (he knew now with a pitiless certainty what for days and until this last hour he had foolishly tried to conceal from himself) he was to make a desperate and probably vain attempt to regain the favor of the splendid being whose offer he had spurned partly from silliness, partly

from cowardice.

He searched his mind unceasingly for words that would both justify him in her eyes and irresistibly convey his tenderness.

The carriage stopped as if at haphazard in the road. A ruddy gleam shot down the avenue. Apparently the lamps had only just been lighted in the lodge. Graesler got out and walked up the bridle path, slowly, to still the violent beating of his heart. The front door was opened promptly in answer to his ring. Simultaneously, the door of the living-room opened and Frau Schleheim appeared. Through the doorway Sabine was visible, seated at the table reading. She looked up from her book.

"It is good of you," said the mother, holding out her hand cordially, "to take pity on us poor forsaken women."

"I ventured to let Fräulein Sabine know I was coming."

"Welcome back," said Sabine, rising and giving him a friendly handshake.

He tried to read her eyes. They rested on his unmoved, far too unmoved. He asked after Herr Schleheim.

"He is travelling," answered Frau Schleheim.

"Where is he now?" asked Graesler, sitting down at Sabine's invitation. Frau Schleheim shrugged her shoulders.

"We don't know. He sometimes leaves us like that. In a week or two he will be back. We know, don't we?" she concluded with a meaning look at her daughter.

"Are you going to stay here long, Dr. Graesler?" asked Sabine.

He looked at her. Her gaze left him unanswered.

"That depends," he answered. "Probably not very long—just until I have settled my affairs."

Sabine nodded as if absent-mindedly.

The maid came in to lay the table.

"You'll stay to supper?" said Frau Schleheim.

He hesitated. His look again questioned Sabine.

"Of course he will. We counted on his staying."

Graesler felt: "She is not loving, she is merely gracious."

He accepted the invitation with a mute nod.

All three were silent, and as silence at the moment was hardest of all for him to bear, he began to speak briskly.

"First of all I must look up Dr. Frank tomorrow. Would you believe it, he never took the trouble to answer my last letters? But I still hope we shall be able to come to terms."

"Too late," said Sabine coolly. Graesler was quick to realize that her tone conveyed a reference to something beside the lost business opportunity. "Dr. Frank," she went on, "has decided to keep up the place himself. Renovations have been going on busily for the last few days. Your friend Herr Adelman is in charge of the work."

"Adelman is no friend of mine," said Graesler. "If he had been, he would certainly have let me know." He shook his head heavily and

slowly, as if he had suffered a serious disillusionment in the architect.

"Since the sanatorium is lost to you," said Sabine politely, "I suppose you will go south again?"

"Certainly," answered Graesler promptly. "To my good old Lanzarote. The climate here! Who knows whether I'd still be equal to a Central European winter."

It occurred to him that on account of the few steamers going to Lanzarote he could not possibly get there before the middle of November and he might find his place filled, as he had not written one way or another.

Oh, well, he was no longer dependent upon his practice there. If he liked, he could take a holiday for six months or more, and if he was economical, he might even give his practice up altogether. The thought alarmed him. He was incapable of living without his profession. He had to make people well, lead the life of a fine, active man. That was probably his destined lot in life. And probably he was destined to lead this life beside this splendid woman. Maybe she was merely punishing him for his delay and putting him to the test again.

He explained that he had not yet made arrangements and was still awaiting a letter from Lanzarote, which might bring the acceptance of certain new advantageous conditions that he had proposed to the administration there. In the event of a refusal, he had decided to devote the ensuing winter to study at various German universities.

"I was far from idle during my stay in the city. I visited the hospital and I had some private practice. A chance case, to be sure. A dear little girl of seven, the daughter of a widow who lives in the same house as I do. I couldn't refuse. Scarlet-fever. It was quite a serious case. But the child is out of danger now. Otherwise I could not have left."

While speaking, Graesler tried to evoke the image of Frau Sommer. Instead he kept seeing the lady with the doll's face of the illustrated papers, the one that had come in his dreams during the voyage home. There must be a resemblance. Why, of course, unconsciously it had struck him immediately.

Sabine seemed to have listened with growing interest, but without much credence, he feared perhaps because of his uneasy conscience. Without apropos she began to speak of her two girl friends.

"You remember them. The younger one became engaged to a summer visitor here from Berlin."

"We're going to Berlin for the wedding," said Frau Schleheim, "and mean to stay some time. That will give us a chance to see the city again." Once more and impatiently, almost imploringly, Graesler's eyes asked Sabine: "How about us two?" But her eyes remained inscrutable. As the evening wore on she seemed to grow milder, more friendly. He felt that he had as good as lost the game. Still his pride rebelled against accepting the mute dismissal that she seemed to intend for him; and he was determined before leaving to ask her for a private talk.

When he rose and with assumed lightness spoke of the possibility of meeting at Christmas in Berlin, Sabine also got up from the table. Evidently she intended to accompany the guest to his carriage. They walked side by side under the pines as in happier days, but silently. Of a sudden, almost involuntarily, Graesler stopped, saying:

“Are you angry with me, Sabine?”

“Angry?” she answered tonelessly. “Why should I be?”

“My letter, I know it, my miserable letter.” In the dim light all he could see was that she winced and made a deprecatory gesture. He tried to explain, feeling that he was floundering more and more hopelessly.

“You misunderstood my letter—completely misunderstood it. It was my conscientiousness, my sense of duty that made me write it. Oh, if I had only done what my heart told me to do. I loved you, I adored you, from the first moment I stood opposite you at your mother’s bed. But I was too craven to believe in my own happiness. After such a cheerless, lonely life as I have had, I had given up hope, I didn’t dare to dream. An old man like me! Almost an old man. Of course it isn’t years that make age. I came to realize this in those long weeks we have been apart. But your letter, your wonderful, heavenly letter—oh, I wasn’t worthy of it.”

The words poured from his lips in a medley, and he knew all the time that the right ones wouldn’t come simply because the way to her heart was barricaded.

“Forgive me, Sabine, forgive me,” he ended hopelessly in an almost stifled cry.

“I have nothing to forgive”—he heard her as from a great distance—“but it would have been better if you had not spoken. I had hoped you wouldn’t. If I had known I would have begged you not to come.”

Her tone was so hard that suddenly Graesler took fresh hope. Wasn’t it affronted love that made her so pitiless? Affronted love—but love which she still felt but of which she was ashamed? He resumed with fresh courage:

“Sabine, I’ll ask this one thing of you, let me see you again next spring, and let me ask you once again.”

She interrupted him.

“It’s rather cold here. Good-by, Dr. Graesler.” Even in the darkness, he thought he could discern a mocking smile on her lips as she added: “I wish you all happiness in the future.”

“Sabine!” He took her hand and wanted to hold it. She withdrew it gently.

“A pleasant journey,” she said. There was back in her voice all the kindness that was now lost to him for ever. She turned, and resolutely, though without quickening her pace, walked back to the house and vanished through the doorway.

Graesler stood only a little while, then hurried to the carriage. As

he drove homeward through the night, wrapped in cloak and rug, a defiant mood took possession of him.

"Very well then," he said to himself. "You will have it so, you yourself thrust me into another woman's arms. You shall have your way. More than that, you shall see for yourself. Before I go south, I shall bring her here for a few days and will go driving past the ranger's lodge. You shall make her acquaintance, shall talk to her. . . . 'Allow me to present my wife to you, Fräulein Sabine. Not so pure a soul as you, but not so cold either. And not so proud, but kind. Not so chaste, but sweet! Katharina is her name—Katharina. . . .'"

He spoke the name out loud, and as the distance between him and the lodge increased, the hotter his longing for Katharina. Soon, soon—to-morrow, to-morrow evening—he felt it with real joy—he would hold his darling in his arms again.

How astonished she would be to find him waiting for her at seven o'clock when she came out of the shop in the Wilhelmstrasse! And a still greater surprise awaited her. There was nothing of the old fogey about him. He had only one wish in the world, to be happy, and he would take happiness where it was offered him so warmly, so unqualifiedly, with such genuine womanliness. He would find happiness with Katharina. . . . with Katharina. . . . He was glad he had seen Sabine. He knew now for sure that Katharina, and no other woman, was the right woman for him.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

NEXT evening, an hour after his arrival, he took up his stand at the street corner from which he could not fail to catch sight of Katharina directly she left the glove shop. The two other saleswomen who were employed at the same counter emerged and disappeared, the shutters were lowered; all the rest of the employees went away; the arc light was extinguished—and still there was no sign of Katharina. Strange, very strange. Her holiday time was at an end. What could be keeping her away from work? Graesler was suddenly fired with jealousy—she was with some one else! With some former acquaintance for whom she had time again, now that the old doctor from Portugal, the fellow with the Indian shawls and amber necklaces, had gone away. Or perhaps with some new friend. Why not? We can quickly take up with new friends, can't we, Miss Katharina, people like us?

Where are you? At the theatre, probably. That's the fixed order of things, isn't it? Theatre the first evening and supper together. The second evening—everything else! You've been through that sort of thing many a time, I suppose.

But that Katharina should link on with a new admirer the very day after leaving the old one, was really a little too much. It was more than a joke! The miserable creature, for whose sake he had lost a Sabine.

Gone off with shawls, and hats, and robes, and trinkets. And making merry with the first young comer over the old fool from Portugal.

With deliberate self-torture, Graesler refused to consider other, more innocent possibilities for explaining Katharina's non-appearance.

Well, what had he better do? The most sensible thing, of course, would be to go home and have done with it all. But he couldn't conquer his feelings to such an extent. He went to the suburb where Katharina lived, intending to watch near her house and see if he would not soon, discover whom she had picked up—unless, she had already installed herself in her new lover's quarters.

But no, that was not likely. There were not many fools to be found who would be willing to take such a baggage into their house, such an artful Miss, such a chatterbox, such an ill-bred, deceitful thing. There was no measure to his contempt for her. He gave himself up to it with a certain voluptuous satisfaction.

"Is that being a Philistine, my dear young lady?" He was suddenly apostrophizing Sabine, against whom he also felt his gall mounting again.

"Well, I can't help it. No one can get out of his own skin, man or woman. One woman is born to be a whore; another is doomed to be an old maid; a third, in spite of the best education in a good family, leads the life of a cocotte, humbugging her parents and her brother and hanging herself as soon as she is too old to attract lovers any more. As for me, I was created to be a prig and a Philistine. But, by God, there are worse things than being a prig. There are some women who, if you're not a prig with them, make a fool of you. The fact is, there is not enough of the Philistine in me. If a certain young lady had put off her appointment to-night and come out of the shop modestly at closing time, I should actually have been capable of taking her off to Lanzarote with me as my wife. That would have tickled you, Mr. Hotel Manager. But no danger now. Thank goodness, I'm coming back as alone as I left, if I go back at all, which is still far from certain. Anyhow, I shan't be there according to your orders on October 27th, even if I still could. I'm going to Berlin first, then perhaps to Paris to have a thoroughly good time such as I've never had in my life."

In imagination he saw himself in certain places of ill repute, dancing with half-naked women; he planned monstrous orgies as a sort of demoniacal revenge on the wretched sex that treated him so trickishly—revenge on Katharina, Sabine, Friederike.

All unwittingly he had arrived at Katharina's dwelling. An unpleasant wind had risen, and was driving the dust along the mean little street. Here and there windows were being hastily closed. Graesler looked at his watch. It was still a good while before eight. How many hours would he have to wait, and how on earth should he pass the time? The wench might not be back till ten, eleven, midnight, the small hours.

The thought of tramping up and down for an indefinite time in the wind and the rain (the first drops had already begun to fall) was exceedingly disagreeable. He began to pay heed to an inner voice which had been faintly trying to make itself heard for some time. Supposing Katharina were at home after all? She might have left the shop earlier than usual—though that was not likely on the first day after her holiday. Or perhaps her holiday was not yet over. She might be spending the last day of freedom with her family. He would not quite accept any of these conjectures. Yet they relieved his mind. Besides he could soon learn the true state of affairs. He had merely to go up to the second story and ask at Herr Rebner's door whether Fräulein Rebner was at home. No one would take that amiss. A family in which the daughter came back from a visit with twice as much luggage as she had had when she left was not likely to be very particular. If she was out, it might be possible to learn under what pretext she was away. And if she was at home, all the better. Everything would be all right, then. He would be able to see her, and make the necessary arrangements for to-morrow, the day after to-morrow, and subsequent days. Everything that had been running through his head would turn out to have been nonsense. He would owe her a mute apology—though his thoughts had been the outcome of a fit of ill-temper for which another woman was far more to blame than Katharina.

So it was with the best intentions that he stood before the door of the flat.

He rang. A small, elderly woman, wearing an apron over her house dress, answered the door and looked at him in surprise.

"Excuse me," said Graesler. "Is this Herr Rebner's?"

"Yes, I am Frau Rebner."

"Oh, of course. Er—er—I wondered if I could have a word with Fräulein Katharina? I had the pleasure—"

"Oh," interrupted Frau Rebner, obviously pleased. "I suppose you are the doctor Katharina met when she was staying in the country with Ludmilla—the gentleman who gave her the lovely shawl."

"Yes, I am. My name is Graesler."

"That was the name, Dr. Graesler. She told us all about you. I'll find out if she can see you. She's in bed. She must have caught a cold."

Graesler was startled.

"In bed? Since when?"

"She hasn't been up at all to-day. She seems to have fever with the cold."

"Have you called a doctor, Frau Rebner?"

"Oh, no. She ate a hearty breakfast. She'll probably be all right again soon."

"Since I'm here, perhaps you'll let me have a look at her. I don't think Fräulein Katharina will mind."

"No. You're a doctor, and it may be very lucky for her."

She led the way through a fairly large unlighted room into a

smaller room, where Katharina lay in bed. The light from a candle beside the bed flickered on a wet cloth that covered the girl's forehead and hid her eyes.

"Katharina!" exclaimed Graesler.

With apparent effort, she pushed the napkin off her eyes. They were dull.

"Good-evening," she said. She smiled faintly, but seemed barely conscious.

"Katharina!"

Graesler quickly pulled down the sheet and slipped the nightgown away from her shoulders. A dark-red rash was visible. Her temperature was already very high; prostration was extreme; and no further examination was needed to tell Graesler that Katharina had scarlet fever.

He sank into a chair close to the bed and held Katharina's hand. He felt guilty and terribly distressed.

There was the sound of an exclamation at the front door. It was the father who had just come in.

"Why, children, what's all this fuss about? Have you really sent for the doctor?"

His wife went to meet him.

"Not so loud," she said. "Her head hurts. This is the doctor she met when she was staying with Ludmilla."

"Oh," said the man drawing nearer. "I'm glad to make your acquaintance. Here I send my daughter to the country for a holiday, and it costs a whole lot, and she comes back sick. Well, I suppose it's nothing much, is it, Doctor? She probably sat out of doors in the evening in cold weather. Didn't you, Katharina?"

Katharina made no answer, and drew the cloth over her eyes again. Dr. Graesler turned to the father. He was a short, stoutish man with dull eyes, almost bald, and with a grey moustache turned up at the comers.

"It's not a cold. It's scarlet fever."

"But, doctor, how can it be? Only children have scarlet fever. Her sister had it when she was five. She ought to have had it then."

The father's loud tones seemed to have cleared Katharina's mind a little.

"Dr. Graesler must know better than you, father," she said. "He'll cure me. Won't you, Doctor?"

"Of course, Katharina, of course," answered Graesler. He loved her at that moment more deeply than he had ever loved any human being in his life.

While he was giving his instructions, Katharina's sister appeared, followed by her husband. The man greeted Graesler with a wink, but when he realized the gravity of the situation, he disappeared with his wife into the adjoining room. Graesler explained to the parents that

he would stay the night, because the first night was of critical importance, and if he watched by the patient, he might head off dangers of which the first signs would escape lay people.

"I say, Katharina," said the father, coming close to the bed, "you're a lucky one. Not many people have a doctor stay with them all night. But—" he drew Graesler towards the door—"I had better tell you right away that we're not wealthy people. When she was in the country, it was only as Ludmilla's guest. You may have noticed it. We merely had to pay her ticket there and back."

His wife told him to stop talking, and led him off into the living room, so as to leave Katharina alone with the doctor.

Graesler leaned over the sick girl; he stroked her cheeks and her hair; he kissed her forehead; he assured her that she would be quite well again in a few days, and must come back to him. He would never let her leave him again, but would take her with him wherever fate led him. He had been drawn back to her by a tremendous force. She was his child, his beloved, his wife. He loved her as no one had ever been loved before.

She smiled contentedly, but as he went on he could tell that his words scarcely penetrated her consciousness. What was going on around her was to her no more than a succession of flitting shadows. He realized that this was to be the beginning of days filled with cruel dread for a loved being who was the prey of an invisible enemy drawing ever nearer. He must arm himself for a desperate struggle, a struggle that from the very start he knew was a hopeless one.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FOR three days and three nights Graesler watched almost without intermission at Katharina's bedside. She never regained full consciousness, and passed away on a gloomy November evening. Two days later, during which Graesler was completely occupied by all the dreary matters attendant upon a death, the funeral was held.

He walked behind the coffin. To Katharina's relatives he said not a word beyond what was absolutely necessary. In his grief they seemed far, far away. He stood beside the grave rigid until the coffin was lowered, then, without taking leave of the others, he stalked out of the cemetery and drove to his flat.

Till evening he lay on the sofa in his study, plunged in a heavy sleep. It was dark when he awoke. He was alone, more alone than he had ever been before, even after the death of his parents and sister. His life seemed to have lost all meaning.

He went out into the street, without knowing what to do or where to turn. He hated people, the city, the world, his profession—his profession which had killed the one creature who had seemed destined to bring happiness to him in his declining years. What was there left

for him on earth? The one consolation seemed that he could, if he wanted to, abandon medicine and never exchange another word with a human being.

The streets were damp. A white mist lay on the lawn in the park where he was walking. He looked up. Torn clouds raced across the sky. He felt tired, tired of his aimless wandering, tired of his own company. He couldn't bear being by himself. It was impossible to go home and spend a desperately lonely night in the rooms where he had been so happy with Katharina, telling over his own fate in the same unmeaning phrases, without response from somewhere, without consolation or sympathy. If he were not to sob and scream and curse out there under the heavens, he knew he had to find some human being to talk to.

His old friend Böhlinger was the only one who would do. So he made for his old friend's house.

Fortune favored him; the lawyer was at home. Graesler found him seated at his desk, wearing a Turkish dressing-gown and veiled in tobacco smoke.

"You here again? What's up? A rather late visit!" He glanced at the clock. It was ten.

"I'm sorry," said Graesler, in a hoarse voice. "I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Of course not! Sit down. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks," answered Graesler. "I can't smoke now. I haven't had any supper yet."

Böhlinger glanced at him with knitted brows. "Something serious seems to have happened. How about the sanatorium?"

"Nothing has come of it."

"Well, well. But that's not what has hit you so hard, has it? Tell me. Of course, I'm delighted to see you at any time, but your coming as late as this—I know there's a special reason. Go on, confess. Do you want advice? A woman in the case?" He smiled. "Unfaithful?"

Graesler made a gesture of dissent.

"She is dead," he said harshly. He sprang to his feet and paced up and down the room.

"Oh," said Böhlinger. He was silent for a space. When Graesler passed him, he seized his hand and pressed it several times. Graesler sank into a chair. He put his head in his hands and wept bitterly, as he had not wept since childhood. Böhlinger waited and smoked. Now and then he glanced at a document on his desk and made a note or two in the margin. When Graesler began to recover his composure, he asked gently: "How did it happen? She was so young."

Graesler looked up, his lips drawn in a smile of derision. "She certainly did not die of senile decay. It was scarlet fever. And it was my fault—my fault."

"Your fault? Did you bring the infection from the hospital?"

Graesler shook his head, leapt to his feet again, and tramped the

room, shaking his hands desperately.

Böhlinger leaned back, watching him.

"How if you told me about it," he said. "Perhaps it would make you feel easier."

Graesler began to tell the whole story of the last few months, hesitatingly at first, inconsecutively, but growing more fluent as he went on. He told of Sabine as well as of Katharina; of his hopes and fears, of his renewed youth; of his dreams in the health resort and in his native town; and of how all had come to naught. Sometimes it seemed to him as if Sabine must be dead, too—that he had killed them both. Occasionally Böhlinger interjected an enquiry or a sympathetic word. When the story was complete he asked:

"Did you come back really intending to marry the girl?"

"Certainly. Do you think her past would have prevented me?"

"By no means. I know that women with a future are not always to be preferred." He stared into space.

"You may be right there," said Graesler. Looking straight at Böhlinger he added: "There was something else I wanted to tell you. . . ." He paused.

The tone of his voice surprised Böhlinger.

"What do you mean?"

"I have read your letters to Friederike—your letters, and other men's letters to her, too."

"Have you really?" said Böhlinger, hardly perturbed, but with rather a wry smile. "That is an old story, my friend."

"Yes, it is an old story," rejoined Graesler.

Feeling the need to sum up his attitude towards the affair briefly and once for all, he added: "Of course the letters made it clear to me why you did not marry her after all."

Böhlinger looked at him uncomprehendingly. Then, his mouth twitching, he answered:

"You think it was because—because she deceived me? That's how the phrase runs. Good Lord, what a fuss one makes about those things when one is young. In reality, she only deceived herself, and I—I deceived myself. Especially the latter. Well, now it's too late."

They were silent for a space.

"It is an old story," repeated Graesler at length, as if in sleep. Intense exhaustion had overwhelmed him, he could hardly keep his eyes open. But he started up when Böhlinger took his hand and cordially urged him to stay the night. He even offered him his own bed. Graesler preferred to lie down as he was, fully dressed, on the sofa in the study. Instantly a profound sleep took him. Böhlinger covered him with a rug, opened the window for a while to let out the fumes of tobacco, arranged the papers on his desk, and left Graesler to his slumbers.

When he awoke, he found Böhlinger standing over him with a sympathetic smile.

"Good-morning," said the lawyer, with a kind glance.

"Like a doctor," thought Graesler, "like a doctor when a child wakes up from the first healing sleep."

The pale autumn sunshine was streaming into the room. Graesler realized that he must have slept a long while. "What time is it?"

At that moment the midday bells began to chime.

He rose and shook his friend by the hand.

"Many thanks for your hospitality. It's time for me to be getting home now."

"I'll go with you," said Böhlinger. "It is Sunday, and I have nothing to do in the office. But you must breakfast first, and the bath is ready."

Graesler accepted his attentions gratefully. Refreshed by his bath, he went to the diningroom, where breakfast was already served. Böhlinger sat beside him and served him, telling him all the news in politics and municipal affairs, trying to keep his thoughts away from his troubles.

"What is the world to me?" thought Graesler, "or the city or the people? Yes, if Sabine could be restored to life—Katharina," he corrected himself, "Sabine is still alive—after a fashion." He smiled, scarcely knowing why.

The friends went out together. The streets were alive with people in their Sunday best, and Böhlinger exchanged numerous greetings. When they passed the glove shop in the Wilhelmstrasse, Graesler regarded its closed shutters with hatred and horror. At length they reached the house where Graesler lived.

"If you have no objection," said Böhlinger when they reached Graesler's house, "I will come up with you."

Out of the front door came a woman plump, pretty, wearing widow's weeds, the gravity of which was modified by the smart tilt of her hat. She was holding a little girl's hand. Her face lit up with surprise and pleasure when she saw the doctor.

"Look! Who's that, Fanny?" she exclaimed delightedly.

But Graesler's eyes went wide as with horror and he gave the child one glance of uncontrolled hate. Without the faintest greeting he passed through the doorway.

Böhlinger noticed that the lady, still holding her daughter by the hand, stood looking after Graesler in amazement, almost in despair. With a displeased shake of his head, he followed him upstairs, determined to ask for an explanation. But before the door of the flat had closed behind them, Graesler burst out:

"That was the child, the mother and the child. It was the child's fault. Katharina had to die, and the child I cured."

"You can't speak of fault," rejoined Böhlinger. "The child's not to blame, neither is the mother. The way you behaved must have been incomprehensible to her."

"I know it," said Graesler. "And of course she doesn't know what

happened since we last saw each other.”

“You stared at her as if she were a ghost. And the way you looked at the child! You should have seen the mother’s face. She was frightened almost out of her wits.”

“I am sorry,” said Graesler. “But she’ll get over it. I’ll explain the first chance I get.”

“You should.” In a merry tone, Böhlinger added: “Especially as she’s a very pretty, pleasant-looking little person.”

Graesler wrinkled his brows and made a gesture of warding off. He begged to be excused a few moments to look at his letters, which he had not seen since his return and might contain something important. The fact was, he could not suppress a faint hope that there might be a word from Sabine calling him back, though he realized the utter senselessness of such a hope. There was not a single communication of the slightest moment.

The friends went to a restaurant. Over a bottle of excellent Rhenish, in the dim light of a warm, cosy recess, Böhlinger advised Graesler not to give himself up to useless sorrow and to take up his work again as soon as possible. The doctor promised to write that very day to Lanzarote to say he would be back by the end of the month. He was confident that he would be welcome.

Over the coffee and cigars, they talked of Friederike. Böhlinger sat amid the smoke-wreaths and listened with half-closed eyes, while Graesler spoke of her with emotion, praising her thoughtfulness and loyalty. He even intimated that when she had her room redecorated and refurnished, she had not been thinking of herself, but, with a prophetic, self-sacrificing sense, of some other woman who might be destined to become her brother’s helpmate and beloved.

Böhlinger merely nodded. Every now and then he gave Graesler, whom he had never known so garrulous before, a look of amazement not unmixed with pity. By and by his attention wandered; he even seemed a trifle impatient, and suddenly arose saying he had an engagement that evening.

Graesler walked home alone. As he paced his study, he felt his grief gradually turn into boredom. He sat down at his desk, and penned a letter to the hotel manager at Lanzarote, explaining that he had to postpone his coming this year, but felt sure it would not cause much inconvenience, since few visitors arrived earlier than the middle or even the latter part of November.

That was the end of his day’s work. He took hat and stick, intending to go for another walk.

On the way downstairs passing Frau Sommer’s door, he hesitated a moment, then rang the bell. The door was opened by the lady herself, who greeted him more cordially than he had any right to expect. He promptly apologized for his behavior that morning. Perhaps Frau Sommer already knew what a disaster had befallen him—and be ready to forgive him.

"I have no idea what you are referring to," she answered. "Won't you come in and tell me all about your trouble?"

Graesler entered and told Frau Sommer that his dear little friend had died after a few days' illness; of what she had died he did not say until Frau Sommer expressed her condolence.

"There's been a great deal of scarlet fever," he said, "almost an epidemic. So I suppose there was no connection between Katharina's illness and little Fanny's, especially as Fanny's illness was so mild that I have some doubt as to whether or not it really was scarlet fever."

Fanny herself came running in. Graesler took her between his knees, stroked her hair, and kissed her forehead.

Tears came to his eyes. He wept quietly. When he looked up again he saw tears in the young widow's eyes.

Next day he visited Katharina's grave, accompanied by Frau Sommer and Fanny. While Graesler stood in silence with bowed head, and Frau Sommer read the inscriptions on the ribbons tying the few simple wreaths that still lay there, the little girl knelt down and prayed with folded hands. On the way back they stopped at a confectioner's, and Fanny returned home with a large box of sweets.

Henceforth Frau Sommer looked after the bereaved bachelor with unostentatious kindness. He spent much of his time, in fact every evening, in the widow's flat. He grew fonder and fonder of the little girl, and always brought her toys, especially wild beasts made of wood or papier-maché, about which Fanny insisted on having stories as if they had been real but enchanted animals. As for Frau Sommer every day she showed by word and look her increasing gratitude for the affection the doctor lavished upon her fatherless child.

Less than a month had elapsed since Katharina's death when Dr. Emil Graesler landed on the island of Lanzarote with little Fanny and her mother, who was now Frau Graesler. The hotel manager was standing beside the gangway, bareheaded as usual, his smoothly-plastered brown hair scarcely ruffled by the breeze.

"Welcome, my dear doctor," was his greeting uttered in the American accent which had irked Graesler the year before. "Welcome, indeed! You have given us a long wait, but we are all the happier to see you. The villa is ready for you, and I do hope Frau Graesler will find it to her taste." He bowed over Frau Graesler's hand, and fondled the little girl's cheek.

The air was drenched in sunshine, as on a summer day. They walked up to the hotel, which faced them in its glaring whiteness, the manager leading the way in lively conversation with the young wife. Behind came Graesler and little Fanny, who was wearing a rather crumpled white linen frock, and whose black hair was tied with a white silk ribbon.

"Do you see that small white house," said Graesler, "the one with all the windows open? That's where you're going to live. Just behind it—you can't see it from here—there's a garden with wonderful trees

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such as you've never seen before. You'll play under those trees; and when it's snowing where you used to live, and when people are freezing there, the sun will shine in the garden just as it's shining to-day."

He went on talking to her, holding her soft hand in his, its gentle pressure thrilling him with a happiness that no other such contact had ever brought him. Fanny looked up at him eagerly drinking in every word.

The manager continued to hold forth to the young wife.

"The season has opened auspiciously," he said. "Your husband will have plenty to do. On the fourth of next month we are expecting His Highness the Duke of Sigmaringen, with the Duchess, children, and suite. . . Ah, this is a choice spot indeed. A perfect little paradise. As Herr Rüdenau-Hansen, the distinguished author who has visited our island regularly for twelve years in succession, remarked. . ."

The wind, which stirs on these shores even on the calmest days, blew away the next words—and many more of the same nature.

THE END.